

Celebrating 35 Years as Indiana's Leading Regional Business Magazine



TRADES CAREERS | SILVER TSUNAMI | GREEN PROJECTS | SPORTS TOURISM

APRIL / MAY 2026

# Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

*Serving greater Northwest  
and North Central Indiana  
and surrounding counties*

## Best of Business Awards

*Winners plan to capitalize on thoughtful  
growth plans laid in 2025*

*Cynthia Roberts  
Indiana University Northwest*



# POWERING YOUR TALENT.



Looking to grow your career? Purdue University Northwest is where it all comes together. It's where academic excellence meets practical experience, and the ideas of today become the solutions of tomorrow. It's where professors search for solutions to tomorrow's challenges and where you'll find the support, mentorship and tools you need to shape what comes next.

PNW offers master's and applied doctoral programs to build opportunities in your current field or launch into a new direction. Gain a high-quality, cost-effective education close to home in Northwest Indiana.

**Forging your own path. That's powering onward.**



# IT'S YOUR BUSINESS, *DREAM BIG.*

Peoples Bank  
will do the rest.

Business banking with us means a financial partnership that delivers individualized solutions that fit. We celebrate what makes your business different from the rest and have the tools to help you move forward.



*Better banking keeps moving forward.*  
[ibankpeoples.com](http://ibankpeoples.com) | 219.836.4400



\*Peoples Bank is a Small Business Administration (SBA) approved lender.



# CONTENTS

APRIL / MAY 2026

## TOP STORY

BEST OF BUSINESS

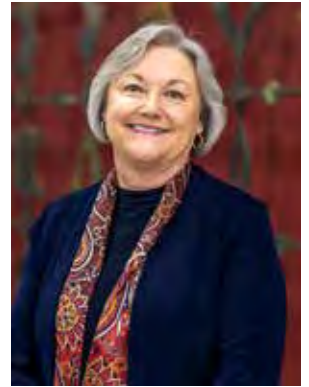
# 12

### 2026 awards winners

*Winners plan to capitalize on thoughtful growth plans laid in 2025*



## ON THE COVER



12 ► Cover photo of Cynthia Roberts, Indiana University Northwest, by Rick Bella

## FEATURES



CONSTRUCTION

# 22

### Trending careers in trades

*Northern Indiana's construction industry touts paid apprenticeships, AI-proof jobs*



SMALL BUSINESS

# 28

### Lots of buyers out there

*Experts prepare for silver tsunami by encouraging entrepreneurs to sell legacy businesses*



ENERGY / ENVIRONMENT

# 32

### Sustainable prospects

*Companies find short-term investment in green projects leads to long-term value*



TOURISM

# 36

### Economic power of play

*Region capitalizes on youth sports trend to drive tourism*

Thank  
You FOR  
VOTING  
US THE  
BEST



AS VOTED BY THE READERS OF  
*Northwest Indiana Business Magazine*

THE **BEST** NORTHWEST INDIANA HOSPITAL GROUP

**NORTHWEST INDIANA  
HEALTHCARE FACILITY**

Cardiology  
Urgent/Immediate Care

 Franciscan **EXPRESSCARE**



LOVE YOUR *extraordinary* LIFE

 Franciscan HEALTH

# COLUMNS



## LEADER PROFILE

# 42

### Essential adviser

*enFocus director teaches startups how to turn ideas into money-making businesses*



## BUSINESS PROFILE

# 43

### Answering the call

*Crown Point answering service provides professional response — no matter the hour*



## MADE IN INDIANA

# 44

### Nozzle worth noting

*Elkhart Brass epitome of best in manufacturing, says Indiana Chamber leader*



## VIEWPOINT

# 48

### Big on housing

*Northwest Indiana Reinvestment Alliance keeps homeowners on track*

# EVERY ISSUE



## BUSINESS NEWS

# 4

### Around the Region

*Learn about people, companies making difference at work and in their communities*

## WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

*Sign up today for our weekly newsletter to get essential regional business stories curated by our editors at [nwindianabusiness.com/mz9z](http://nwindianabusiness.com/mz9z).*



## ADVERTISE WITH US

*Learn more about building relationships with our readers by scanning the QR code with your phone or visiting [nwindianabusiness.com/9cbk](http://nwindianabusiness.com/9cbk).*



# ADVERTISING INDEX

American Precision Services .....	39	NIPSCO .....	27
Biggby Coffee .....	45	NWI Forum .....	15
Burke Costanza & Carberry LLP .....	11	Opportunity Enterprises .....	35
Centier Bank .....	C4	Peoples Bank .....	1
Edward Jones .....	17	Powers Health .....	41
Franciscan Health .....	3	Pulse Technology .....	24
Indiana University Northwest .....	38	Purdue Federal Credit Union .....	47
JRS Mar/Com .....	45	Purdue University Northwest .....	C2
Krieg DeVault .....	31	School City of Hobart .....	26
Krugger Lawton CPAs .....	19	Staff Source .....	30
Larson-Danielson Construction .....	40	Surf Internet .....	25
Latitude Commercial .....	45	The Grand .....	16
McMahon & Associates CPAs .....	C3	Wightman .....	9
Nature Conservancy .....	20, 21		



ON THE WEB: Scan the QR code with each of our stories using your smartphone's camera to see it posted on our website [NWIndianaBusiness.com](http://NWIndianaBusiness.com). Then easily share it on social media with colleagues and friends.



**CEO / President**

Troy Linker

**Publisher/Executive Editor**

Heather Pfundstein

**Contributing Writers**

Don Babcock	Doug Ross
Bill Dolan	Kerry Sapet
Michael Gonzalez	Ted Slowik
Heather Pfundstein	Marie Wilson
Michael Puente	

**Editorial Advisory Committee**

Olivia Allen	Leigh Morris
Kelly Anoe	Anthony Sindone
Rita Bacevich	Rich Shields
Erin Bonin	Faith Spencer
Erika Dahl	Spencer Summers
Lorri Feldt	Christina Wagner
Katie Holderby	Chelsea Whittington
Keith Kirkpatrick	Jason Williams
Troy Linker	Linda Woloshansky

**Copy Editor**

Shelley Hendricks

**Photo consultant**

Rick Bella


✉ [news@nwindianabusiness.com](mailto:news@nwindianabusiness.com)

 [NWIndianaBusiness.com](http://NWIndianaBusiness.com)

 [MichianaBusinessNews.com](http://MichianaBusinessNews.com)

 [facebook.com/nwindiananbiz](https://facebook.com/nwindiananbiz)

 [linkedin.com/company/nwindianabiz](https://linkedin.com/company/nwindianabiz)

 219-230-3777

Northwest Indiana Business Magazine

905 Joliet St. #237, Dyer IN 46311

is owned and published by

Linker Media Group, Inc.,

Many contributing writers are expert from various fields and provide advice to our readers on their individual specialties. Experts provide general information, for educational purposes, regarding legal, accounting, insurance and other professional issues. This information is not a substitute for specific professional advice given by qualified professionals who are aware of an individual's particular circumstances.

© Copyright 2026. All rights reserved

Reproduction without permission is prohibited.

Visit [NWIndianaBusiness.com/subscribe](http://NWIndianaBusiness.com/subscribe)

Two-year subscription rate is \$19.95.

One-year subscription rate is \$14.95.

**BIG NUMBER**

**1,200**

The number of Northwest Indiana residents enrolled in more than 30 National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee apprenticeships

► PAGE 22

**IN THIS ISSUE**

**A**lysa Liu's gold-medal performance at the 2026 Winter Olympics might seem unattainable, but her attitude offers a valuable lesson in finding joy in our work. Business leaders in the Region understand this way of thinking. Their ideas and actions have led to a renaissance in regional growth.

Our annual Best of Business winners also know this kind of joy. They have overcome obstacles and managed success with a passion for their customers and communities. Their employees matter too. One company even opened an office in Colorado to accommodate a manager who moved away. Winner Joe Skibbie says it best. He wants his staff at JRS Mar/Com to "have more fun in 2026." That sentiment reminds me of a certain Olympic champion!

Other stories in our April/May issue feature joy in work and play.

Organizations are finding new ways to train trades workers. Perks include apprenticeships that pay students to learn, allowing them to skip the high cost of student loans. Plus, youth just might find a career that brings them joy and dependable cash flow.

Entrepreneurship is another way to find meaningful work, but a grand idea isn't always necessary. Buying a longtime small business can be the door to prosperity

too. Erin Corbett knows this. She is lucky to have found a business that will allow her to pursue her passion for model horse collecting.

Companies also find joy in projects good for the environment — and for their bottom lines. Nexus W2V is building a plant to turn food waste into synthetic natural gas in La Porte County, and the University of Notre Dame's Alumni Hall has a green roof, which saves heating costs.

But joy is most evident at youth sports events, an increasing driver of economic development in the Region. From beaming parents to exuberant athletes, sports venues and organizations bring tourism dollars home.

We also feature leader Blessing Mene, who has fallen for the Region's charm after moving here from Nigeria. Great Lakes Communications takes pride in answering phone calls for businesses, even in emergencies. Elkhart Brass's glow-in-the-dark firehose nozzle earned the state's Coolest Thing prize. At the Northwest Indiana Reinvestment Alliance, its leaders find joy in helping residents find and keep housing.

Plus, Don Babcock shares his love of math and its role in creating economic prosperity for all. Now that sounds joyful to me. Enjoy this issue!

— Heather Pfundstein, publisher/editor



Provided by Bethel College

**Bethel College hosts the NAIA National Championship at the Elkhart Aquatics Center, their home swim facility. ► PAGE 36**

# Professional advancement



SHARE STORY ON PHONE

## Businesses and organizations share new hires, promotions, accolades

HEATHER PFUNDSTEIN

### Accounting

**CLH, CPAs & Consultants** welcomed **Seth Stemper** as a staff accountant and **Rowan Pruim** as an associate to the firm, which has offices in La Porte, Michigan City and Valparaiso.

### Banking

**Mike Schrage** stepped down as CEO of Merrillville-based **Centier Bank**. His son-in-law **Chris Campbell** was promoted from president to CEO. Schrage will continue as board chairman. **Elizabeth Basoski** was promoted to risk officer. She joined the bank in 2007 as a teller at the Crown Point downtown branch. **Kat da Silva** was promoted to branch manager of its Highland Martha Street branch. **Lisa Misch** was welcomed as vice president and SBA relationship specialist in the Valparaiso office.

**James Dworkin**, chancellor emeritus and professor of management in the Mitchell Daniels School of Business at **Purdue University**, will retire from the **Horizon Bancorp** board of directors on May 7, the end of his current term. He has served on the board since 2003. **Julie Freigang**, vice president and chief information officer of **CF Industries Holdings**, resigned from the board. **Melissa Smith-Watkins**

was promoted to assistant vice president and retail banking training director. She started in 2022 as learning and development programs manager. **Susan May** was named a mortgage loan originator. **John Rybicki** was appointed vice president, senior commercial loan officer in Lake County.

**Joe Kloska** and **Satchel Warnell** were appointed mortgage loan originators for the Lake County and Chicago area markets at **Notre Dame Federal Credit Union**.

**Steven Minchuk**, president of the **Northern Indiana Area Labor Federation**; **Randy Palmateer**, business manager and executive director of the **Northwest Indiana Building and Construction Trades Council**; and **Corey Campbell**, business manager of **LiUNA Local 81**, were appointed to **Tech Credit Union's** board of directors.

**Larry Mayers**, group head of business banking; **Ron Zeltwanger**, group head of community banking; and **Bill Burton**, east region president, will retire from **1st Source Bank** over several months in 2026, while **Shelli Workman**, **Daniel Conroy**, **Sean Kearns**, **Jim Martindale** and **Todd Obren** were promoted Feb. 1. Workman was promoted to group head of business banking; Conroy to group head of personal banking; Kearns to east region

president; Martindale to central region president; and Obren to the bank's first regional president of the Michigan region.

**Donald Robinson-Gay** was promoted to executive vice president and chief credit officer of **Lake City Bank**, which has locations in the South Bend-Elkhart area. He most recently was senior vice president and a member of the bank's management committee. He started at the bank in 2018.

Goshen-based **Interra Credit Union** promoted several employees, including **Brian Rook** to director and head of people strategy; **Shawna Koontz** to vice president of human resources operations and benefits manager; and Ali Moren to assistant vice president, human resources business partner. **Shaylyn Garza** was appointed associate vice president and treasury management sales officer, serving the St. Joseph and Marshall counties markets. **Rob Geiger** joined as an associate director. He also operates a farm.

**Larry Myers** was appointed to the boards of directors at **First Merchants Corp.** and **First Merchants Bank**. He formerly was president and chief executive officer of **First Savings Bank** and **First Savings Financial Group**, which finalized a merger with First Merchants on Feb. 1.



BANKING  
Chris Campbell



BANKING  
Elizabeth Basoski



BANKING  
Kat da Silva



BANKING  
Donald Robinson-Gay

**Dennis Devine** was named **Wells Fargo & Co.**'s head of business banking for business owners with annual sales up to \$25 million.

## Community

**Gianni DiTola** and **Ryan Pierce** of the **Diocese of Gary** were conferred the Ministry of Lector in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at the Pontifical North American College, Vatican City State.

## Construction

**Kelly Jernigan** was hired as the business development manager in **F.A. Wilhem's** South Bend office. The construction company opened an office there in October. Jernigan most recently was a regional development executive at the **United Way of Northwest Indiana.**

**Kevin Coros**, project manager, was promoted to associate in the Valparaiso office of **McMahon**, an engineering, architectural and consulting firm, which has headquarters in Neenah, Wisconsin.

**Eva Ennis** joined the **Herstoric Development** team in South Bend as support for design and architecture. **Michelle Riordon** was hired as a licensed architect. **Skylar Giles** rejoined the construction team in 2025.

## Economic development

**Deann Patena**, president of **Crossroads Chamber**, completed the **Institute for Organization Management** professional development program, the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce's** education program for nonprofit, association and chamber executives.

**Economic Development Corp. Michigan City's** new board members include Dr. **Vidya Kora** and **John Rieger Jr.** of **Blue Chip Casino Hotel Spa.** Councilman **Bryant Dabney** concluded his term on the board after two years. Kora, an internal medicine physician, serves patients at the **Franciscan Physician Network Franklin Health Center** in Michigan City.

**Erik Nelson** was promoted to business development manager at the **La Porte Economic Advancement Partnership.** He previously served as the workforce development coordinator for four years.

The **South Bend Regional Chamber** honored 2026 award winners: Distinguished Business Leader: **Mark Neal**, Bradley Co.; Woman of Influence: **Laurie Nafziger**; Outstanding Young Business Leader: **Kristopher Priemer**; Lifting Voices: **Youth Service Bureau of St. Joseph County**; Economic Impact: **Beacon Health System**; and Small Business of the Year: **South Bend Code Works.**

**Scott Meiner** of **Lippert Components** based in Goshen was appointed to **Conexus Indiana's** executive committee.

**Bethany Hartley**, president and CEO of the **South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership**, was elected vice chair of the **Indiana Economic Development Association.**

## Education

**James Savannah** was named director of admissions at **Bethel University** in Mishawaka.

**Purdue University Northwest** Nils K. Nelson Endowed Professor of Integrative Human Health **John Durocher** was named a 2026 Fellow of the **American Physiological Society** in the teaching of physiology category.

**Gina Avila**, **Purdue Extension** community development educator in Porter County, was selected to participate in the 2026 North Central Extension Leadership Development program.

**Timothy Malchow**, professor of world languages and cultures at **Valparaiso University**, was named Teacher of the Year by the **Indiana Foreign Language Teachers Association** and the Collegiate Teacher of the Year by the **Indiana Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of German.**

**Edward Maginn**, the Keough-Hesburgh Professor of Engineering in the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at the **University of Notre Dame**, was elected a member of the **National Academy of Engineering.** Biomedical engineer **John Fisher** will join the University of Notre Dame as director of the campus-wide Bioengineering & Life Sciences Initiative and Arthur J. Schmitt Professor in the Department of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering. His appointment begins Aug. 1. Fisher is chair of the Fischell Department of Bioengineering at the **University of Maryland.** He will succeed **Paul Bohn**, who retired in December. The Rev. **Gregory Haake** was appointed vice president for mission engagement and church affairs, effective July 1. He



**BANKING**  
Shelli Workman



**CONSTRUCTION**  
Kevin Coros



**EDUCATION**  
Gina Avila



**EDUCATION**  
John Durocher

## AROUND THE REGION



**FINANCE**  
Allen Kilburn



**HEALTH CARE**  
Gregory Piper



**HEALTH CARE**  
James Mack



**HEALTH CARE**  
Jim Callaghan

is an associate professor of French and Francophone studies and the religious superior of the Holy Cross priests and brothers at Notre Dame. He will succeed the Rev. **Austin Collins**, who is stepping down to return to teaching in the department of art, art history and design and to his work as a sculptor.

The **Gary Community School Corp.** appointed retired **Gary Police Department** Detective Corp. **Gregory Fayson** as the director of security.

### Entertainment

**Corey Hagelberg** of Gary is the **Lubeznik Center for the Arts'** public art liaison in Michigan City. Hagelberg is also the co-founder and director of the **Calumet Artist Residency**. He is pursuing an MFA in sculpture at the **School of the Art Institute of Chicago**.

### Finance

**Howard Bailey Financial** adviser **Les McDaniel** passed his Uniform

Investment Advisor Law Examination.

**Allen Kilburn** joined **TrueWealth Advising Group** as a financial planner.

### Government

**Tristan Leonhard** was named acting director of **Valparaiso Parks**.

The **Hobart Fire Department** welcomed Firefighter/EMTs **Samuel Stevens** and **Benjamin Casillas**.

New members of the **City of Gary's** Metro Train Revitalization Board include **Terry Carter**, senior manager of safety and security for **U.S. Steel's** Gary complex and Midwest operations; **Kevin Kimble**, a senior talent developer with American Family Insurance; and **Sharon Levels**, member of the **Gary Public Transportation Corp.** Board of Directors.

**Matthew Kiley** of **MetroNet** and **Shawn Kelly** of **Involution**, a surveying and landscape architecture company, were reappointed to the **Indiana Natural Resources Foundation** board. Kiley represents St. Joseph County and Kelly Lake County.

**Randy Palmateer** of **Northwestern Indiana Building & Construction Trades Council** was appointed to the **Ports of Indiana Commission** representing Lake County.

**Thomas Collins** of **Luke Oil Co.** was reappointed to the **Gary/Chicago International Airport Authority** board of directors, representing Porter County.

**Jeff Balon** of the **Porter County** sheriff's office was reappointed to the **Indiana Criminal Justice Institute** board of trustees.

**Elizabeth Bailey** of **Indiana Wesleyan University** was reappointed to the **State Board of Physical Therapy**. She represents Marshall County.

**Judith Schoon**, of the **LFE Group Investments & Insurance** in Griffith, was reappointed to the **Indiana State Commission on Aging**.

**Heather Delgado** of **Barnes & Thornburg** was reappointed to the **Judicial Nominating Commission** for the **Superior Court of Lake County**.



**HEALTH CARE**  
Julie Mora



**HEALTH CARE**  
Shazia Siddiqui



**INSURANCE**  
Jessica Lopez-Liggett



**LAW**  
Anderson Franklin

# FROM INFRASTRUCTURE TO IMPACT

*Wightman is your proven partner for project success.*

Energy reliability starts at the source. Wightman supports AEP transmission and substation rebuild projects with advanced surveying and spatial scanning services—powering properties, progress, and potential.



**NILES AREA TRANSMISSION  
IMPROVEMENTS**



Architecture | Civil Engineering | Survey



**LAW**  
Mark Torma



**MANUFACTURING**  
Mark Zweig



**TECHNOLOGY**  
Kyle Sallmen



**TOURISM**  
Jenna Brouillette

**Richard Nussbaum** was appointed to the **State Employee Appeals Commission** for St. Joseph County.

**Jason Durr** of **Christopher B. Burke Engineering** was reappointed to the **State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers**.

Lake County Councilman **Dave Hamm** is retiring at the end of his term in district 1. Hamm will become **Scott Miller's** campaign manager. Miller plans a run for Hamm's seat.

### Health care

Dr. **Shazia Siddiqui**, owner of the **Lafayette Pain Center**, is seeing patients in Rensselaer as an independent **Franciscan Health** provider. Family medicine Dr. **Julie Mora** joined the **Franciscan Physician Network** in Crown Point.

Cardiologist **Elizabeth Riddell** joined **Powers Health Medical Group** in Hobart and Valparaiso.

**James Mack** was appointed vice president and chief financial officer at **Methodist Hospitals** based in Gary. Mack was controller from 1987 to 2006.

**Gregory Piper** was named president of **Beacon Allegan** after serving as interim since November. He has worked for **Beacon Health System** since 2001, including overseeing **Granger Hospital** since it opened in November 2019.

**Jim Callaghan**, who is the executive vice president and chief operating officer of **Franciscan Alliance**, is the board chair of the **Indiana Hospital Association** this year. Callaghan has been with Franciscan for over 25 years and served as a flight surgeon in the **U.S. Air Force**.

### Insurance

**Jessica Lopez-Liggett** was named commercial president of **Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield** in Indiana. She most recently served as regional vice president of sales for Indiana.

### Law

South Bend resident **Jessica Legault** joined Boca Raton, Florida-based **Staffing GC** as a paralegal. The law firm exclusively serves the staffing industry.

**Mark Torma** was appointed **Indiana Legal Help's** executive director. He most recently was the North Central Indiana office director and senior managing attorney with **Pro Bono Indiana** since its founding in 2020, and was the executive director of the **Volunteer Lawyer Network** in South Bend starting in 2011.

**Anderson Franklin** was promoted to principal at **Jackson Lewis**, a national employment law firm. He will work in the Chicago office and also serves Indiana clients.

### Logistics

**Brady Jacoba** was appointed the first chief commercial officer in the **Ports of Indiana's** 65-year history. He previously worked at **Lauth Group**, **Indy Chamber** and **Volumod Indy**. **Josh Webb** was appointed director of government affairs.

### Marketing

**Jenna Justman** was promoted to lead marketing strategist after two years as a marketing strategist at **WeCreate Media** based in Valparaiso.

### Manufacturing

**Elkhart Brass Manufacturing's** XD

Glow-in-the-Dark Smooth Bore Nozzle was named champion in the **Indiana Chamber's 2025 Coolest Thing Made IN Indiana** contest.

**Seth Woolf**, head of corporate development and investor relations, will leave **Thor Industries** based in Elkhart to pursue a role outside of the organization.

**Mark Zweig** was promoted to chief operating officer for **Janus Motorcycles** in Goshen.

**Cleveland-Cliffs Inc.** appointed **Ralph Michael III** as lead independent director of the company's board of directors. Michael succeeds **Douglas Taylor**, who resigned.

### Media

**Kelly Anoe**, president and CEO of the **Legacy Foundation**, and **Olivia Allen**, membership and marketing events coordinator at the **Northwest Indiana Forum**, joined **Northwest Indiana Business Magazine's** editorial advisory board.

### Philanthropy

The **Crown Point Community Foundation** was re-accredited with the **Community Foundations National Standards** program.

**Kevin Nuppenau** was named vice president of the **Porter County Community Foundation**. He most recently was the parks director for the **City of Valparaiso** and the executive director of the **Valpo Parks Foundation**.

The Valparaiso-based **Shirley Heinze Land Trust** welcomed new board members, including **Laura Blaney**, a law clerk at **Douglas, Koeppen and Krsak**, who is seeking a law degree at

**Loyola Law School; Mark Bouman**, a retired geography professor and the environmental program director for the **Field Museum**; **Jan Cervelli**, professor of art and environmental studies at **Saint Mary's College** at Notre Dame; **Brian Kortum**, the director of environmental permitting at **NiSource**; and **Kay Nelson**, the environmental director at the **Northwest Indiana Forum**. **Ben Taylor** was hired as stewardship director. He most recently served as the regional conservation partnership program coordinator at the **Conservation Law Center** in Bloomington.

**Aida Abuelizam**, director of customer experience and technology engagement at **NiSource**, was appointed chair of the **Northwest Indiana Influential Women Association's** board of directors.

### Real estate

**Larry** and **Heather Hitz** sold **Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Executive Group Real Estate** in Valparaiso to **Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Indiana Realty** based in Indianapolis.

### Sports

**Rhonda Zaluckyj** was named president of **Patti's All American Gymnastics Inc.** in Dyer. She has been with the company for 20 years and seven as vice president.

### Staffing

**Anna Cenova** was hired as a recruiting and marketing specialist at **TalentSource**, a recruiting and staffing firm based in Mishawaka.

### Technology

**Kyle Sallmen** was promoted to director of information technology at **Pulse Technology**, which has a Merrillville location. He also will continue as virtual chief information officer. He joined Pulse in 2022. **Bella Crimaldi** joined as a sales representative, and **Arianna Teichman** as a billing specialist.

**Heather Darring**, chief information officer at **Kappa Alpha Theta**, and **Todd Bandauski**, chief technology officer at **Weaver Popcorn** are the new leaders of **TechPoint's CIO**

**Network** advisory board. **Darring** will serve as president and **Todd Bandauski** as vice president. **TechPoint** is based in Indianapolis.

### Tourism

**Jenna Brouillette** joined the **Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau's** staff as brand strategy manager. She previously was the marketing and communications

manager for **The Lerner Theatre** in Elkhart.

### Workforce

**Samantha Smith**, the **Center of Workforce Innovations'** director of adult education, earned the Certified Workforce Development Professional designation from the **National Association of Workforce Development Professionals**. ■

Recognized by *Northwest Indiana Business Magazine* 17 Years In A Row!

# BCC



BURKE COSTANZA & CARBERRY LLP

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Advisors you want.  
Advocates you need.

NOW OPEN  
607 Jefferson Ave, La Porte, IN

9191 Broadway | Merrillville, IN 46410 | t. 219.769.1313

156 Washington St. | Valparaiso, IN 46383 | t. 219.531.0134

[bcclegal.com](http://bcclegal.com)



# 2026 awards winners



Winners plan to capitalize on thoughtful growth plans laid in 2025

HEATHER PFUNDSTEIN

**N**orthwest Indiana Business Magazine's 2026 Best of Business winners know greatness doesn't just happen. It is the result of hard work, tenacity and joy for doing work that is fulfilling and profitable. Plus, a little luck and knowing the right people always helps.

That includes the magazine's readers, who are business leaders, owners, experts and their employees. For the past 21 years, readers have taken a survey to determine who is the best of the best in Northwest Indiana and Michiana.

"In many ways, the magazine acts as a connector for businesses, bringing together people, ideas and opportunities that contribute to the continued growth and success of Northwest Indiana," said Steve Carlisle, president of Wightman.

Best of Business winners in 2026 also know keeping your customers and

employees happy leads to referrals and accolades.

"What makes these awards particularly meaningful is knowing they come from the people who know us best, our patients," said Raymond Grady, president and CEO of Franciscan Health Munster, Dyer and Crown Point.

Some of this year's winners have been on the list a long time, but others have landed on it for the first time. This means the magazine's readers use the survey to reward their clients, vendors, colleagues and advertisers.

"Winning (an award) for the sixth year in a row means a lot because we lean on our clients to help tell our story ... and when we have them out there singing our praises through reviews and recognitions, it means a lot," said Aaron McDermott, co-founder and president of Latitude Commercial.

Patti Komara, CEO of Patti's

All-American Gymnastics, is a first-time Best of Business winner.

"I've been in business for 57 years and treasure all the moments of loss — because you learn from being at the bottom — triumph, and human interactions with staff and our customers," Komara said.

## Year of change

**W**inners reported that 2025 was a year of change. From new technology to new offices and employees, growth came with hard work and perseverance.

John Wilkening, executive vice president and chief banking officer at Tech Credit Union, said 2025 was one of the credit union's most successful years.

"Our greatest challenge was managing that rapid growth and ensuring we scaled our team and operations to support it," he said.



**2026**  
*Best of*  
**Michiana**  
**Business**

Other companies also invested in their staffs. Urschel Laboratories hired more than “70 new employees in 2025 to help reduce lead times,” CEO Rick Urschel said.

Latitude Commercial went so far as to open another office when an employee moved away.

“When one of our property managers wanted to relocate to Denver, we made the decision to open an office there rather than lose the talent,” McDermott said. “That meant restructuring our Northwest Indiana operations, within our property management division, while also launching a new office in a new market from the ground up.”

Wightman plans to conduct an employee survey to gauge engagement.

“Ensuring that our employees feel supported, valued and connected to the firm’s mission remains a top priority,” Carlisle said.

Calder Capital, which has an office in Valparaiso, welcomed new team members and set sales records.

“Scaling the firm brought new challenges as we welcomed several talented team members and formalized

our leadership structure,” said Max Friar, founder and managing partner. “Personally, it required me to step back, trust the team, and evolve my role as the firm grows.”

Winners also noted that technology upgrades were part of growth plans in 2025.

“We proactively migrated more than 150 employees across seven physical offices, along with our remote workforce, to a virtual desktop environment,” said CPA Barry Hall, managing partner at Kruggel Lawton CPAs. “This initiative represented a meaningful evolution in how our firm operates and took approximately six months to fully integrate.”

Latitude implemented a CRM for its brokerage division.

“We also plan to continue strengthening the systems and processes that support our brokers so they can focus on production and client advisory rather than administrative friction,” McDermott said.

#### **Plans for 2026**

**A**s for the year ahead, Best of Business winners mostly said they plan to

capitalize on growth plans laid in 2025.

“Our goal for 2026 is to continue growing in a thoughtful and sustainable way while preserving our culture,” said Kari Marich, CFO and owner of Staff Source. “We want to expand our reach, invest in our team, and keep providing dependable workforce solutions — without ever losing the personal, family-oriented approach that defines Staff Source.”

Technology will play a part at many of our winning companies.

“In 2026, we will continue strengthening our workforce, refining how we use data to guide decisions, and building practical partnerships that expand access and improve outcomes,” said Bill Trowbridge, president and CEO at Regional Health Systems (a member of Regional Care Group).

Others will focus on creating and maintaining connections.

“Staying connected to the business community helps ensure our students gain practical, relevant skills that translate directly into professional success for the individual and their community,” said Symphony Raudry,

## BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS



**“Our goal is controlled expansion adding the right people, the right clients, and the right infrastructure to build long-term value in both markets.”**

— Aaron McDermott  
Latitude Commercial



**“We did a deep dive into what our staff wants in pay, benefits, and how we can show appreciation specifically for them.”**

— Patti Komara  
Patti's All American Gymnastics



**“Our office truly operates like a family, and that same mindset carries over to how we work with our clients and associates.”**

— Kari Marich  
Staff Source



**“As a 100% employee-owned company, our employees take pride in continuously growing the successes of our company.”**

— Rick Urschel  
Urschel Laboratories

graduate programs coordinator at the Indiana University Northwest School of Business and Economics.

Companies will need help from higher education and other community partners to meet the growing need for workers.

“Northwest Indiana is experiencing notable growth driven by population trends, infrastructure investment, and redevelopment initiatives that are revitalizing communities,” Carlisle said. “Being part of that momentum has been incredibly rewarding for our team as we help support projects that will have lasting impacts.”

Ultimately, helping others become great is at the core of our winners' ideals.

“Our goal is to continue to grow and innovate by developing new programs, improving the learning environment, supporting the wellbeing of our communities, and ensuring that our graduates are successful,” said Cynthia Roberts, interim executive vice chancellor for academic affairs and former dean of the School of Business and Economics at Indiana University Northwest. “We are never really done — it's a journey.”

For Joe Skibbie, founder of JRS Mar/Com and a first-time Best of Business winner, his motto in 2026 is to help his

staff “have more fun!”

“With performance improvements a constant goal, we don't want to be blinded to the fact that we enjoy what we do and have the opportunity to advocate for a number of exciting industries,” he said.

Northwest Indiana Business Magazine also considers it an honor to support the Region's business community. Thank you for contributing to our Best of Business survey!

### BANKING AND FINANCIAL

#### BEST ACCOUNTING FIRM

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**McMahon & Associates  
CPAs P.C.**

MICHIANA  
**Krugel Lawton CPAs**

#### BEST BANK FOR BUSINESS

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Centier Bank**

MICHIANA  
**Horizon Bank**

#### BEST BANK FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Centier Bank**

MICHIANA  
**Horizon Bank**

#### BEST BUSINESS INVESTMENT FIRM

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**CAPTRUST**

MICHIANA  
**Calder Capital**

#### BEST CREDIT UNION

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Tech Credit Union**

MICHIANA  
**Notre Dame Federal  
Credit Union**

**BEST INSTITUTION FOR OBTAINING A BUSINESS LOAN**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Centier Bank**

MICHIANA  
**Horizon Bank**

**BEST WEALTH MANAGEMENT ADVISORY FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Centier Bank**

MICHIANA  
**Centier Bank**

**BUSINESS SERVICES**

**BEST AD AGENCY OR MARKETING FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**JRS Mar/Com**

MICHIANA  
**Sera Group**

**BEST COMMERCIAL PRINTER**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Miss Print**

MICHIANA  
**Reprographic Arts**

**BEST EMPLOYEE STAFFING FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Staff Source**

MICHIANA  
**TalentSource**

**BEST GRAPHIC OR WEB DESIGN FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**IdeaSeat**

MICHIANA  
**Sera Group**

**BEST INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CONSULTING FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Pulse Technology**

MICHIANA  
**Vista Technologies**

**BEST INTERNET PROVIDER**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**MTA / Midwest Telecom of America**

MICHIANA  
**Surf Internet**



# BE THE BOLD VOICE FOR NORTHWEST INDIANA



**170+ MEMBERS**



**20+ ANNUAL EVENTS**



**7 COUNTIES**

Join 170+ leaders across all 7 counties who are shaping the future of business in Northwest Indiana. The NWI Forum hosts 20+ member events a year, markets the region as **the** place to live, work, and invest, drives **bold** initiatives, and is the **voice** of business.

**Join Today. Shape Tomorrow.**



**LEARN MORE AT [NWIFORUM.ORG](http://NWIFORUM.ORG).**

LAKE PORTER LA PORTE NEWTON JASPER PULASKI STARKE

## BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS



“At the heart of what we do are the dedicated men and women who serve our patients day in and day out.”

— Raymond Grady  
Franciscan Health



“Implementing changes based on student and employer feedback ensures our program remains relevant and responsive.”

— Symphony Raudry  
IUN School of Business  
and Economics



“Our goal is to continue growing ... while staying true to our mission of supporting working families and reinvesting in the Region.”

— John Wilkening  
Tech Credit Union



“Kruggel Lawton made several impactful investments in talent and geographic expansion.”

— Barry Hall  
Kruggel Lawton CPAs

### BEST PLACE TO PURCHASE OFFICE EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Pulse Technology**

MICHIANA  
**Office Interiors**

### BEST PLACE TO PURCHASE OFFICE FURNITURE

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Office Interiors**

MICHIANA  
**Office Interiors**

### BEST TELECOMMUNICATIONS FIRM

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**MTA / Midwest Telecom of America**

MICHIANA  
**Surf Internet**

## THANK YOU, NORTHWEST INDIANA

The Grand is honored to be voted **Best Caterer** by *Northwest Indiana Business Magazine*.

From weddings and corporate events to memorable dining across our Meraki Hospitality Group restaurants, we're grateful to serve this community.

**MERAKI**  
HOSPITALITY GROUP

merakihospitalitygroup.com

The GRAND  
CATERING & EVENTS

**RAMEN DISTRICT**

PROVECHO  
LATIN PROFITORS

PAPPAS  
RESTAURANT & BAR

LIGHTHOUSE  
RESTAURANT & PRIVATE DINING

Paris's  
RESTAURANT & BAR

**MERAKI**  
MOBILE

### COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION

#### BEST COMPANY TO WORK FOR

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Urschel Laboratories Inc.**

MICHIANA  
**Centier Bank**

#### BEST MINORITY OWNED BUSINESS

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**18th Street Brewery**

MICHIANA  
**Visions GPS Branding**

---

**BEST UNIVERSITY FOR A TECHNOLOGY DEGREE**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Purdue University Northwest**

MICHIANA  
**Indiana University South Bend**

---

**BEST UNIVERSITY TO ATTAIN AN MBA**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Indiana University Northwest**

MICHIANA  
**University of Notre Dame**

---

**BEST UNIVERSITY ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Indiana University Northwest**

MICHIANA  
**Indiana University South Bend**

---

**BEST VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESS**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Veterans' Cafe & Catering**

MICHIANA  
**Acme Water World**

---

**BEST WOMAN-OWNED BUSINESS**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Patti's All-American Gymnastics**

MICHIANA  
**Visions GPS Branding**

---

**CONSTRUCTION AND REAL-ESTATE**

---

**BEST COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Facet Architecture**

MICHIANA  
**Shive-Hattery**

---

**BEST COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION FIRM FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Larson-Danielson Construction**

MICHIANA  
**Tonn and Blank Construction**

---

**BEST COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION FIRM FOR REMODELING OR EXPANSION**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Larson-Danielson Construction**

MICHIANA  
**Tonn and Blank Construction**

---

**BEST COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPING FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Total Terrain Solutions**

MICHIANA  
**Beary Landscaping**

---

**BEST COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Latitude Commercial**

MICHIANA  
**Cressy Commercial Real Estate**

---

**BEST ENGINEERING FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Millies Engineering Group**

MICHIANA  
**Wightman**

---

**BEST RESIDENTIAL HOME CONSTRUCTION FIRM**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Homes of Distinction**

MICHIANA  
**Schrock Homes**

---

**Edward Jones**

>edwardjones.com | Member SIPC

Investing That Reflects  
**Your Business Values**

Every business is built on purpose. We take the time to understand what matters most to you—*your goals, values, and vision*—so your investment strategy supports the future you're working to build.

**Get in touch today to build a strategy around what matters most.**



Michael P. Dexter, AAMS™  
Logan M. Dexter

Financial Advisors  
420 Merrillville Road  
Crown Point, IN 46307  
219-663-1234

## BEST OF BUSINESS AWARDS



**“Balancing client needs while managing growth is an ongoing effort.”**

— Steve Carlisle  
Wightman



**“My focus is on building a firm that will thrive long after I’m gone, which means making decisions today that align with that long-term vision.”**

— Max Friar  
Calder Capital



**“We have implemented many innovations that strengthen who we are and what we do.”**

— Cynthia Roberts  
Indiana University Northwest



**“Seeing different systems move in the same direction has been meaningful. When coordination improves, outcomes improve.”**

— Bill Trowbridge  
Regional Health Systems

### BEST RESIDENTIAL HOME REMODELING CONSTRUCTION FIRM

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Apex Construction & Remodeling**

MICHIANA

**Affordable Remodelers**

### BEST GOLF COURSE FOR CHARITABLE OR BUSINESS EVENTS

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Innsbrook Country Club**

MICHIANA

**Blackthorn Golf Club**

### BEST RESTAURANT FOR BUSINESS ENTERTAINING

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Gamba Ristorante**

MICHIANA

**Essence of Elkhart**

### BEST RESIDENTIAL REAL-ESTATE FIRM

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**McColly Real Estate**

MICHIANA

**Cressy & Everett Real Estate**

### BEST MEETING SITE FOR LARGE GROUPS

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana**

MICHIANA

**Blue Chip Casino, Hotel & Spa**

### BEST PHOTOGRAPHER FOR EVENTS

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Bella Photography Studios**

MICHIANA

**Josef Samuel Photography**

## EVENTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

### BEST CATERER FOR EVENTS

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**The Grand**

MICHIANA

**Lasalle Catering & Events**

### BEST MEETING SITE FOR SMALL GROUPS

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Center for Visual and Performing Arts**

MICHIANA

**City of South Bend’s Technology Resource Center**

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

### BEST FITNESS OR WELLNESS FACILITY

NORTHWEST INDIANA

**Crossroads YMCA**

MICHIANA

**Beacon Health & Fitness**

**BEST HEALTH CARE FACILITY  
FOR CANCER TREATMENTS**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Northwest Cancer  
Centers**

MICHIANA  
**MHO Care**

**BEST HEALTH CARE FACILITY  
FOR CARDIOLOGY**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Franciscan Health**

MICHIANA  
**Beacon Health System**

**BEST HEALTH CARE FACILITY  
FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Regional Health Systems**

MICHIANA  
**Michiana Behavioral  
Health**

**BEST HEALTH CARE FACILITY  
FOR ORTHOPEDICS**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Lakeshore Bone &  
Joint Institute**

MICHIANA  
**South Bend  
Orthopaedics**

**BEST HEALTH CARE  
FACILITY FOR PHYSICAL OR  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Lakeshore Bone &  
Joint Institute**

MICHIANA  
**South Bend  
Orthopaedics**

**BEST HEALTH CARE FACILITY FOR  
URGENT OR IMMEDIATE CARE**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Franciscan Health**

MICHIANA  
**Beacon Health System**

**BEST HOSPITAL OR  
HOSPITAL GROUP**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Franciscan Health**

MICHIANA  
**Beacon Health System**

**LEGAL AND INSURANCE**

**BEST LAW FIRM FOR BUSINESS  
ACQUISITIONS AND MERGERS**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Burke Costanza &  
Carberry LLP**

MICHIANA  
**THK Law**

**BEST LAW FIRM FOR  
CORPORATE LAW**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Burke Costanza &  
Carberry LLP**

MICHIANA  
**THK**

**BEST LAW FIRM FOR  
ESTATE-PLANNING**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Burke Costanza &  
Carberry LLP**

MICHIANA  
**THK Law**

**BEST LAW FIRM FOR LITIGATION**

NORTHWEST INDIANA  
**Burke Costanza &  
Carberry LLP**

MICHIANA  
**THK Law**

**Focus on  
your passion.**  
Let America's top-rated  
CPAs handle the rest.

**KRUGGEL  
LAWTON<sup>CPA</sup>**  
www.klcpas.com  
Indiana | Michigan | Tennessee

**2026  
Best of  
Michiana  
Business**

# MONARCH FESTIVAL OF EAST CHICAGO A JOURNEY FOR GENERATIONS

SHERRY CRAWLEY

**M**onarchs are the only butterfly species that complete a two-way migration, traveling from central Mexico to the northern United States, and back again in the fall.

“Among Indigenous groups rooted in the regions of Mexico where monarchs appear, there are many legends and myths that tie the butterflies to the souls of ancestors, believing that they live on through nature and the environment,” says Joel Perez-Castaneda, project director with The Nature Conservancy in Indiana.

The butterfly’s return to Mexico each fall coincides with Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). Artistic representations of monarchs are incorporated

Land in their migration corridor has been developed and converted to agriculture, meaning less milkweed and more pesticides. The ancient, complex choreography of birth, death and movement across thousands of miles could be further interrupted by climate change. Shifts in temperature cue monarchs to move; if it is too warm during spring, they might migrate farther north, meaning a longer trip to their winter home.

## Love along the way

In 2018, The Nature Conservancy worked alongside partners to organize El Festival de la Monarca (The Monarch Festival), which has become

## JOIN US AT THE FESTIVAL

► Celebrate monarchs with the families of Northwest Indiana! Learn more about the Monarch Festival and watch a video from the event at [nature.org/events](https://nature.org/events) or scan this QR code.



if we could get the community engaged in conservation.”

The celebration includes educational activities for people of all ages, as well as food, music, art and dance. About



Photos © Susan MiHalo/TNC

**The 2025 East Chicago Monarch Festival included costumes and a butterfly release. This year’s event is Aug. 29 at Kosciuszko Park.**

into altars honoring former generations, and celebrations often include people dancing in monarch costumes.

Despite that affection, monarch populations have decreased 80% over the last 20 years.

Monarch larvae feed on milkweed, which gives them a bitter taste that repels predators.

an anticipated event each fall (or autumn) when the butterflies are migrating through Northwest Indiana on their southbound journey.

“Northwest Indiana has a vibrant Mexican community made up of people who moved here from Mexican states such as Michoacán where monarchs overwinter,” says Joel, “so we wondered

800 people attended in 2025, and according to Marino Solorio, director of the East Chicago Parks and Recreation Department, planning for 2026 is underway.

“The Monarch Festival is a fun way to share information about monarchs and other pollinators, inspire people to plant native flowers and milkweed, and promote cultural connections,” says Marino.

Marino, who has been involved in planning the event from the beginning, says, “This is a festival with a purpose. I always go and wear my butterfly cape. I guess I’m the monarch man!” ●

**“The Monarch Festival is a fun way to share information about monarchs and other pollinators, inspire people to plant native flowers and milkweed, and promote cultural connections.”**

Marino Solorio, director of the East Chicago Parks and Recreation Department

# Together, we find a way.

Boosting biodiversity is at the heart of The Nature Conservancy's mission, and it has become even more urgent in recent years.

The threats can be overwhelming, but we're continuously working on solutions. Working with our partners, we are restoring habitats in northwest Indiana—in Gary and along the Grand Calumet River—to protect the variety of plant and animal life that is crucial to our future.

Explore our work at  
[nature.org/indiana](https://www.nature.org/indiana)



Monarch butterfly feeding on milkweed © Fauna Creative

# Trending careers in trades



Valparaiso University engineering students work on a water purification project in Guatemala.

Provided by Valparaiso University

## Northern Indiana's construction industry touts paid apprenticeships, AI-proof jobs

BILL DOLAN

High school students sold on the traditional college-to-professional career track face the prospect of graduating into an AI-shattered job market.

Local employers, labor and education officials hope to pivot many graduates onto another path — Northern Indiana's booming construction industry.

"White collar occupations are beginning to feel the effects of artificial intelligence, particularly in fields such as finance, accounting, legal services, technology, marketing and administrative roles," said Kevin Comerford, the Construction Advancement

Foundation's director of professional development. "Skilled trades remain largely insulated from widespread automation."

Shawn O'Brien, executive director of South Bend's Michiana Area Construction Industry Advancement Fund, said the past 20 years have been difficult for hiring in the industry.

"Worker demand is at an all-time high, having never fully recovered from the 2008 downturn and older baby boomer generation workers retiring," he said.

All hands are needed on deck for everyday construction of logistics and e-commerce warehousing, road and highway construction, in addition to major construction projects in the

works and planning stages:

- Distribution centers for FedEx in Gary and John Deere near Lowell
- Gary's 145,000-square-foot Lake County Convention Center
- Nippon Steel's \$3.1 billion modernization of U.S. Steel, Gary Works
- New construction and renovation of hospitals in South Bend and Crown Point
- Notre Dame University's construction of \$500 million research facilities
- New Carlisle's \$3.5 billion, 680-acre electric vehicle battery plant
- Multi-billion-dollar Amazon data centers and related NIPSCO



SHARE STORY ON PHONE

energy infrastructure investments in Northern Indiana.

O'Brien said construction jobs come with perks as well.

"The union construction story is a great one to tell — skilled training, high pay and excellent benefits, and in some apprenticeship programs, an associate's degree as well," he said.

The State of Indiana is aware of the need. It funded vocational education to the tune of \$222 million this school year, said Allison Kuehr, associate commissioner for the Indiana Commission for Higher Education.

O'Brien said apprentices also get paid as part of the free programs.

"It's a fantastic way to begin a lifelong career, without the debt of higher education," he said.



Photo provided by Shawn O'Brien

**It's a fantastic way to begin a lifelong career, without the debt of higher education."**

— Shawn O'Brien,  
Michiana Area Construction  
Industry Advancement Fund

Other students might benefit from learning about the trades, O'Brien said. "We are losing the opportunity to reach the rest of the students who think secondary education is their only and best pathway to a career," he said.

State educators are opening up high school completion prerequisites to include credit for work-based learning, under the Graduation Pathways and state earn-and-learn programs.

Kuehr said about 260,000 Indiana students take some form of CTE classes before deciding on a college-bound or trades-bound curriculum. Of those 11,610 are enrolled in a building trades program this school year.

"There is a growing future in skilled trades work to be electricians, carpenters, plumbers, pipefitters, ironworkers,

millwrights and operating engineers," Zahraee said.

Lisa Daugherty, president and CEO of Valparaiso's Center of Workforce Innovations, said the READY NWI initiative connects students with the tools they need to thrive as adults.

"We serve as a backbone organization aligning K-12 area schools, higher education, employers and other community partners to ensure students graduate into high-demand careers," she said.

The nonprofit has helped more than 7,500 students at 28 schools in 43 school districts.

"In the past year alone, the Region recorded more than 94,000 unique job postings and demographic shifts in the working-age population, signaling

a sustained demand for workers," she said.

### Career dress rehearsal

Porter County Career and Technical Education in Valparaiso provides juniors and seniors construction trades coursework in carpentry, electrical, HVAC and plumbing. The organization offers opportunities for industry certifications and even dual credit toward high school graduation and college.

Area schools, like those in Chesterton's Duneland School Corp., "offer internship, work-study and career exploration programs that place students in real work environments, giving them valuable workplace experience and insight into career options tied directly to their interests," Daugherty said.

Derek Bodley, director of the Gary Area Career Center serving Gary and River Forest schools, said his CTE facility provides a pipeline to career opportunities.

"It's a dress rehearsal for students who are still trying to figure it out," he said. "We try to reach our students first in middle school. We do an interest assessment to direct them to areas specific to their interest that they might be successful at."

CTE isn't just for students for whom a building trade job is the best they can hope for.

"We have young people who are interested in college-bound careers but first want to go directly into the workforce," Bodley said. "Once they've completed their two years here, they have more options than if they rushed into post-secondary life, only to find out later they are working in a field that they're not really passionate about."

Ben Modlin, chair of Mishawaka High School's building trades and industrial technology programs, said his students get direct hands-on learning.

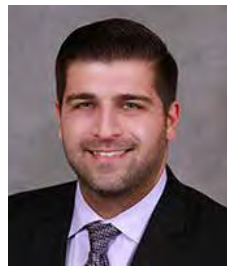


Photo provided by PNW

**There is a growing future in skilled trades work to be electricians, carpenters, plumbers, pipefitters, ironworkers, millwrights and operating engineers."**

— Afshin Zahraee  
Purdue University Northwest

### Holistic approach

Afshin Zahraee, Purdue University Northwest associate professor, said recruiting new talent requires engaging students early and convincing them of long-term career opportunities.

"Regional high schools partner with workforce organizations and trade foundations to introduce students to skilled construction careers through hands-on events, apprenticeship information sessions, and construction career days that bring industry professionals into schools," he said.

O'Brien said that outreach must include all students.

"I'm old enough to remember mandatory high school shop classes where everyone was exposed to learning the pride of using your hands to create and build," he said. "High school CTE (career and technical education) programs today do a good job of introducing those students to the basics of construction, but unfortunately, they only reach those students who choose to participate in the programs."

## CONSTRUCTION

“Our students help build a house from the ground up every year,” he said.

Students are paired with professional building trades workers to do everything from carpentry to electrical wiring and tile installation.

Mishawaka’s CTE programs have grown to the point where the school may soon hire another teacher.

Modlin said one of his recent students, who came from a family of college graduates, turned down higher education. The student had high enough grades to be salutatorian of his graduating class.

“He didn’t want the debt,” Modlin said. “He’s a carpenter now. I expect he will go into business



Photo provided by Derek Dodd

for himself, hire a crew and make some real money.”

Phillip Scott, a Larson-Danielson Construction carpenter, said he first became interested in the trades through his high school vocational training.

“That gave me hands-on experience and helped me see that construction was something I wanted to do as a career,” Scott said. “We toured job sites, and that is how I first learned about Larson-Danielson.”

Since graduation, Scott has worked full time in the carpenters union and has earned a welding certification.

“Learning new skills has helped me become more valuable on job sites and continues moving my career

forward,” Scott said. “The trades have given me a clear career path and something I can be proud of.”

### Getting the word out


Many high schools hold career day events or send students off campus to regional job fairs, including the Trades Day sponsored by the South Bend Chamber and the University of Notre Dame.

Comerford said the Construction Advancement Foundation hosts an annual skilled-trades show in Lake County where construction apprenticeship programs offer a hands-on approach. Students get to operate a virtual backhoe, put on an ironworker’s tool belt and a fall-protection harness and walk iron beams.

Larson-Danielson, a La Porte-based general commercial contractor, recruits at high schools and regional job fairs, partners with chambers of commerce, union training centers and local universities to support their workforce.

**“Parents are reluctant for their children to work in construction until they find out how much they can earn and the skills we give that no one can take from you.”**

— Derek Dodd  
Central Midwest Regional  
Council of Carpenters



**JOIN US FOR  
FOOD, RAFFLES,  
AND FACETIME WITH  
THE INDUSTRY'S  
LEADING VENDORS**




**RSVP HERE**

**CUSTOMER  
APPRECIATION DAY  
2026 OPEN HOUSE**

**MAY 20, 2026**

**AT OUR INDIANA HQ:  
3801 E LINCOLN HWY  
MERRILLVILLE, IN 46410**



John Dudlicek, vice president and chief operating office at Highland's Grimmer Construction, said he goes to high school career days to encourage young people to give his industry a chance.

"We stay in touch with labor organizations to be on the lookout for new people interested," he said. "Gen Zers are showing much more interest in seeing there is a nice career in the trades to make good money to raise a nice family and show talent."

He said some of his recruits only went to college for a couple of years but now are making "good money" working for him.

"(They) are going to have wonderful careers," Dudlicek said.

Derek Dodd, Indiana director of the Central Midwest Regional Council of Carpenters, said winning parents and educators over is part of the issue. His organization hosts career exploration nights for school officials and parents.

"Parents are reluctant for their children to work in construction until they

find out how much they can earn and the skills we give that no one can take from you," Dodd said.

### More than handy work

Kate Lee, executive director of education and workforce for the South Bend Regional Chamber, said it's not all manual labor.

"Trades employers still need accountants and estimators and sales people," she said. "A lot of people start with an apprenticeship program and go on to a bachelor's degree in project management. Some want to start their own businesses."

Tim Ervin, strategic initiatives director for Gary's Powers and Sons Construction, said choosing trades can also mean going to college.

"Powers needs people in our offices as

much as we need people working in the field," Ervin said. "We need project engineers and managers who have college training and the past work experience."

Some workers start off in trades jobs right after high school but later get a degree.

"We have someone who went to trade school, worked a trade and has gone to Ivy Tech and got an associate's degree in construction management," Ervin said. "So higher aspirations and his work, which gives him the soft skills, are making him a better job superintendent."

PNW's department of construction science and organizational leadership offers degrees

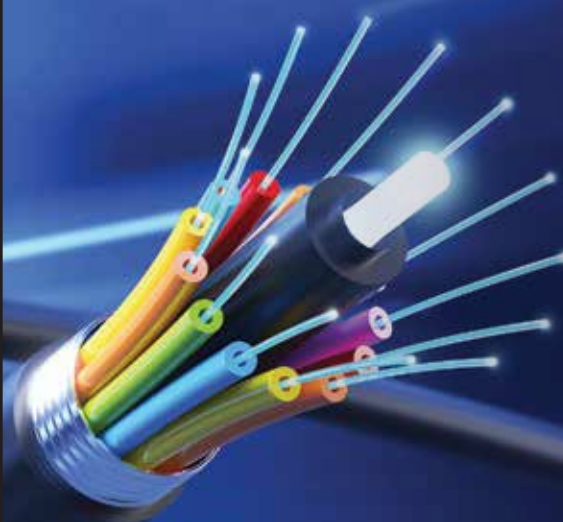
for students with apprenticeships or associate degrees to advance their education, "without starting over



Photo provided by Joe Gambill

**Applications for our apprenticeships have gone from 300 to over 1,000 a year."**

— Joe Gambill  
IBEW Local 153



# SURF Internet®

## The Business End of Connectivity


**2026  
Best of  
Michiana  
Business**

- Fiber-fast internet
- Symmetrical speeds
- NO data caps
- Local customer service
- NO contracts\*
- FREE whole-business WiFi\* powered by eero
- FREE expert installation\*

**BUSINESS**  
 FIBER INTERNET PLANS  
 STARTING AS LOW AS  
\$85/mo\*

Internet isn't just for email anymore. It runs everything you do—from day-to-day operations to how you serve customers, pay vendors and most importantly get paid. When it's slow or unreliable, it impacts everything.

Surf delivers fiber-optic internet built for how businesses actually work. That's why Surf Internet is the business end of connectivity—where real work gets done.



**Call 1-844-422-3470**

**Visit [SurfInternet.com/business](https://SurfInternet.com/business)**

\*Restrictions apply. Visit [SurfInternet.com](https://SurfInternet.com) for details. ©2026 Surf Internet

## CONSTRUCTION

— reinforcing that trade careers can lead to leadership and management roles,” Zahraee said.

Georges El-Howayek, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering department at Valparaiso University, said they offer degree majors in civil and electrical engineering, among others and deliver a 100 percent job placement rate for students.

Their students can test the skills they learn in the classroom outside it too.

During the university’s 2025 spring break, students went to Guatemala. They partnered with a nonprofit organization to install a water filtration and purification system to provide clean drinking water and were returning to continue their work this spring.

### Apprenticeships with benefits

Joe Gambill, training director for the International Brotherhood of

Electrical Workers Local 153 of South Bend, said they recruit at high schools and offer apprenticeships paying \$20.70 an hour with full medical benefits.

He said those benefits resonate with Gen Zers wary of college debt.

“They would rather get out and earn money,” Gambill said. “Applications for our apprenticeships have gone from 300 to over 1,000 a year.”

Large-scale construction projects are one factor in that increase.

“With the advent of data centers, there has been a huge need for qualified electricians,” Gambill said. “We have over 1,600 traveling electricians from all over the country, including our 1,100 members working on our area

projects.”

Dodd said offering a fair wage and benefits helps attract apprentices.

“Our first-year apprentices are north of \$20 per hour along with a benefit package on top of that — employer paid pension and annuities, health



Photo provided by Kevin Comerford

**“A career in the skilled trades is among the most future-proof career paths available today.”**

— Kevin Comerford  
Construction Advancement  
Foundation

insurance adds up to around \$34 to \$35 an hour and in some areas \$40 an hour for a total package,” he said.

Scott said he worked as an apprentice with the carpenters’ union the summer between his high school junior and senior years.

“That summer gave me real job site experience,” he said. “It helped me build confidence and grow my skills.”

Comerford said about 2,500 Northwest Indiana residents are now enrolled in more than 30 federally regulated and approved National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee debt-free, earn-while-you-learn apprenticeships across Lake, Porter, La Porte and St. Joseph counties.

“Even with today’s low unemployment rate, there is typically a strong pool of applicants competing for apprenticeship openings,” he said.

### Future proof

Larson-Danielson considers the growth and future of skilled trades talent vital, said Heather CyGan, a human resource generalist, and Nick Larson, vice president.

Larson-Danielson employs 75 percent of its workforce as union laborers, carpenters, cement masons, bricklayers, ironworkers, operating engineers and Teamsters.

“A career in the skilled trades is among the most future-proof career paths available today,” Comerford said.

Technology won’t soon replace hands-on tasks, but it should make some of the work easier.

“Digital tools, automation and AI-driven planning are improving efficiency, precision and project coordination,” Zahraee said. “But they are enhancing, rather than replacing, the need for human trades skills.”

That might make trades jobs more attractive, Comerford said, because wages will rise if the labor supply stays limited and demand increases.

“As technology continues to reshape the broader labor market, the value of hands-on skills and real-world problem-solving in construction will only continue to rise,” Comerford said. ■



# HOBART UNIVERSITY

BUILDING COLLEGE & CAREER READY  
BRICKIES ONE BRICK AT A TIME

HOBART UNIVERSITY TOTALS  
2018-2025:

69,553

COLLEGE CREDITS EARNED

\$9,512,817.18

GRAND TOTAL SAVINGS

THE FUTURE IS YOURS...  
plan today!

VISIT [WWW.HOBART.K12.IN.US/HU](http://WWW.HOBART.K12.IN.US/HU) TO LEARN MORE!

The School City of Hobart is a nationally recognized leader in innovation and educational excellence.

As a Distinguished Project Lead The Way District, an Early College mentor school, and a district where students graduate with degrees and credentials, SCOH prepares learners for a rapidly changing world.

With exceptional early childhood programs and national recognition for AI innovation, **excellence starts here.**



Learning about energy efficiency can help your business reduce energy usage. **NIPSCO's energy efficiency programs** offer expert guidance and incentives to support smarter savings. Start saving today.

[NIPSCO.COM/BUSINESS](https://www.nipSCO.com/business)



**LEARN  
MORE  
SAVE  
MORE**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY  
PROGRAMS

**NIPSCO**<sup>®</sup>  
ENERGY EFFICIENCY



# Lots of buyers out there



“Legacy Leaders Chat” breakfast with Wade Breitzke of WeCreate (left), Mark Chamberlain of CAPTRUST (middle) and Gus Olympidis of Family Express (right). The panel discussed entrepreneurship and how Chamberlain and Olympidis are approaching succession planning.

Photo provided by WeCreate Media

## Experts prepare for silver tsunami by encouraging entrepreneurs to sell legacy businesses

KERRY SAPET

In downtown corridors across Northwest Indiana, family-owned machine shops hum beside third-generation bakeries and hardware stores that opened before the interstate.

These small businesses are the backbone of the Region’s economy and identity. They make up more than 99% of Indiana businesses, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration.

But over the next decade, thousands of small business owners across Indiana will consider retirement. Some will close their doors. Others hope to sell.

“For the past two years, we’ve been waiting for the silver tsunami, but it’s been more like a silver trickle,” said Max Friar, founder and managing partner of Calder Capital based in Michigan. “After COVID, everything felt unstable. From 2020 to 2025, everything was pent up — with sellers wanting to sell but waiting until things settled down.

Now, it’s settling and sellers are coming out. All the baby boomers are retiring and selling.”

State leaders estimate that 25% of Indiana’s economy is tied to small businesses that could change hands or close in the coming years. Without new owners ready to step in, jobs, community anchors and decades of institutional knowledge could vanish.

The challenge has captured the attention of the state’s leadership. Brian Schutt, director of the Indiana office of entrepreneurship and innovation, has been urging Hoosiers to rethink what entrepreneurship looks like. It’s not only about launching tech startups or inventing the next app. It’s also about buying and growing the local diner or the HVAC firm that already has customers, employees and a reputation.

“We want to accelerate what’s working,” Schutt said about existing businesses that will need new owners. He

has been sharing his message around the state and spoke at the Society of Innovators at Purdue Northwest’s induction Oct. 29 at Avalon Manor in Merrillville.

In Northwest Indiana, his message is resonating.

### Exit planning

The implications of small businesses closing their doors are enormous.

In communities like Hammond and Valparaiso, small businesses are economic engines, providing jobs and sponsoring Little League teams. A wave of closures would ripple outward, reducing tax bases, increasing vacant storefronts and weakening supply chains.

“We work with founders at every stage of business, and there’s a challenge we see emerging frequently: how to exit a business with intention and profitability,” said Taylor Rodriguez, account manager at WeCreate Media in



SHARE STORY ON PHONE

Valparaiso. “In Indiana, we have incredible founders who’ve built incredible companies, but too many transitions happen late or feel forced, and that puts jobs, families and communities at risk.”

A wave of successful transitions could usher in renewed investment. New owners often modernize technology, expand marketing and explore untapped markets. They bring fresh perspectives while upholding legacies.

A growing ecosystem of public and private organizations is emerging to support business succession in Indiana.

“Indiana is investing in entrepreneurs, not just at the startup moment, but across the full business lifecycle,” Rodriguez said.

### New partnerships

Gov. Mike Braun’s recently created office of entrepreneurship and innovation aims to strengthen the state’s entrepreneurial pipeline and address the looming ownership gap.

The office is teaming up with regional partners, chambers of commerce and economic development groups to promote acquisition entrepreneurship. The state is coordinating with lenders to improve access to financing for business buyers and opening up grant funding for regional innovation hubs tackling ownership transitions.

Lower Lincoln, a Valparaiso venue designed to support entrepreneurs, received a Community Collaboration Fund grant through the Indiana Economic Development Corp. The grant will support the development of an ownership exit-planning program.

“Our exit-planning program is designed to help owners understand their business value, plan their transition and protect what they’ve built,” Rodriguez said. “Our hope is simple: give founders real support and transition strategies that help keep businesses rooted in the communities they’ve helped build.”

WeCreate Media is partnering with the Indiana Small Business Development Center and Purdue Northwest to develop the program. It will offer a three-phased approach to preparing for a transition, including a business valuation, growth potential and financial modeling and pre-exit

improvement strategies.

“This grant allows us to build and test this programming locally, and offer it to business owners at no cost,” Rodriguez said. “The support is practical, founder-first and truly built for Northwest Indiana.”

### Business sales

Candace Armstrong, founder of Armstrong Law Offices in Brook, recommends working with a collection of advisers. A CPA and lawyer are vital for the buyer and the seller.

“The key to selling a business is knowing yourself and what you want and need,” Armstrong said. “You’ve got to do the soul searching at the start. You need to get clear on what you want and then identify the right professionals to help you.”

Experts also recommend that owners begin exit planning two to five years before retiring.

Firms like Calder Capital play key roles. Specializing in mergers and acquisitions for small and midsize businesses, Calder Capital helps owners prepare their companies for sale and determine value. It markets companies to buyers and navigates negotiations.

“A third-party objective valuation is important. Analysts typically use the market method, which is similar to appraising a home,” Friar said. “It’s a financial driven analysis of profit and loss and net income. They reconstruct profits to show real earnings and then find comparable companies.”

Unlike national investment banks that focus on multimillion-dollar deals, regional firms understand the realities of owner-operated companies — where the founder may still handle sales calls or manage key relationships personally.

“Sometimes owners have the wrong idea. They think there’s not a buyer for their business: their children don’t want it, or their employees won’t buy it. So, they close,” Friar said. “All those

people lose their jobs, vendors lose business and the community suffers. We encourage every owner to try to sell because they are preserving all those things. There are lots of buyers out there.”

### Successful scenarios

Unlike large corporations, small businesses often lack formal succession plans. Some owners have been too busy running day-to-day operations to map out an exit. Others assumed a child or employee would take over. That’s often not the case.

“We don’t have that generational transfer of a business as strongly. As a society, we’ve moved away from that model,” Armstrong said. “It’s no longer ‘if your dad is a grocer, you’re a grocer.’ People are exploring their own career pathways.”

In 2022, Pat Popa, president and CEO of Popa Heating & Cooling, was ready to retire. Her husband, Nick, had founded the business in 1968, but their two sons followed their own career paths. She wanted to leave the company in good hands.

“Many small business owners have spent years developing their businesses. They are often leaving legacies,” Friar said. “Their employees are like family. They want buyers to have those same values. Many are looking for that fit or they won’t sell.”

Popa found that fit with Jesse Hernandez, an employee of six years.

“The day Jesse came to work for me he said, ‘I want to be your right-hand guy, and I want to buy this business someday,’” Popa said.

Popa said they shook on it and both stayed true to their word.

“We built our business on family values,” Popa said. “I knew Jesse would take care of our customers and be honest and fair. It seems like he’s taking the business to the next level, which makes me really proud.”



photo provided by Max Friar

**“Now, it’s settling and sellers are coming out. All the baby boomers are retiring and selling.”**

— Max Friar,  
Calder Capital

## SMALL BUSINESS

### Path to business ownership

Acquisition entrepreneurship presents a pragmatic opportunity for sellers and buyers.

The Stone family and long-term model horse collector Erin Corbett are a prime example. The Stones founded Shipshewana-based Stone Horses in 1996.

“A few years ago, I went back to graduate school to receive my executive MBA,” Corbett said. “In that process I created a business plan for what I’d do if I got to run my own model horse business. It was a solid business plan, and through that experience, I found a real path to business ownership.”

Corbett reached out to see if the Stones had a plan for their retirement. In 2024, they retired and sold the company to Corbett.

“This felt totally out of reach previously for someone like me. I don’t come from generational wealth, and I certainly did not have the resources for this personally,” Corbett said. “But with a strong enough plan and the right

skill sets on the team, I was able to pull together. We made it happen, and now I get to do my dream job every day.”

Buying an established company may not generate splashy headlines, but it offers sellers the ability to retire and boost a new generation of ownership.

“The chances of the Stones finding a buyer who was already in the model horse community were very small, so this was a longshot for both of us,” Corbett said. “They have expressed to me that it’s been a real pleasure to see their business grow and evolve under the guidance of a fellow model horse enthusiast.”

### Financing purchases

One hurdle for many would-be buyers is capital.

“Most financing comes down to preparation and the right partners,” Rodriguez said.

Many buyers work with local or regional banks or use U.S. Small Business Administration-backed loans. Seller financing can also be a practical way to align incentives and reduce risk.

“The best first step is getting clean financials and starting early conversations with lenders and advisers so expectations are clear from Day 1,” Rodriguez said.

Across Indiana, there are numerous examples of successful ownership transitions in

manufacturing, trades and professional services. While each story differs, common threads include early planning, professional guidance and transparent communication with staff.

The coming decade in Northwest Indiana will determine whether hundreds of legacy businesses quietly disappear or enter new chapters under fresh leadership. The state is mobilizing. Regional nonprofits are innovating. Private advisers are structuring deals. Lenders are adapting. But success depends on owners willing to plan and entrepreneurs willing to step forward.

The story unfolding across Indiana is not one of decline but one of transition. The silver tsunami could become a wave of opportunity, preserving the Region’s economic backbone while inviting the next generation to build on it.

“When a transition is done well, it protects what’s already been built while creating new growth,” Rodriguez said. “And it keeps jobs local, customers happy, and communities strong.”

In communities built on grit and resilience, passing the torch may be the most important act of entrepreneurship yet. ■



photo provided by Max Friar

**“This felt totally out of reach previously for someone like me. I don’t come from generational wealth, and I certainly did not have the resources for this personally.”**

— Erin Corbett  
Stone Horses



Staff Source

## Stressed out about finding the right candidate?

Let us take the weight off of your shoulders!

<b>We typically staff for:</b>	<b>Our services:</b>
▶ Industrial	▶ Prescreening
▶ Janitorial	▶ Interviewing
▶ Maintenance	▶ Training and testing
▶ Warehouse	▶ 24/7 support line
▶ Clerical/Administrative	▶ Fully customizable

We are the BEST in Northwest Indiana...  
Our employees know it and our clients know it...  
Give us a try, and you'll know why.



www.StaffSourceUSA.com    7205 Indianapolis Blvd Hammond, IN 46324    219-989-WORK(9675)



## ***WHERE NORTHERN INDIANA TURNS FOR LEGAL COUNSEL***

From day-to-day operations to transformative matters, Krieg DeVault delivers practical, industry informed guidance to clients across a broad range of sectors. The firm's attorneys bring experience from business, regulatory, and in-house environments, providing precise counsel on complex legal, transactional, and operational needs.



11005 Broadway Suite D, Crown Point, IN 46307

[www.kriegdevault.com](http://www.kriegdevault.com)

Carmel | Chicago | Crown Point | Fort Wayne | Indianapolis | Mishawaka

© 2026 Krieg DeVault LLP. This constitutes attorney advertising. Krieg DeVault LLP, Indianapolis, IN is responsible for this content.

# Sustainable prospects



Photo provided by Arkos Design

Wellfield Botanic Gardens in Elkhart uses biophilic design to transform the built environment into a restorative bridge that reconnects the community with its local ecosystem.

## Companies find short-term investment in green projects leads to long-term value

DOUG ROSS

**T**he industrial revolution has left a legacy of environmental harm, but the battle between profits and the environment isn't absolute. Examples of corporate concern about sustainability and the environment abound.

According to a 2025 Morgan Stanley report, 88% of companies see sustainability projects as a long-term opportunity. Plus, 80% of companies with sustainability policies said they see a measurable return on their sustainable investments.

"Companies around the world report an alignment between corporate strategies and sustainability priorities as they seek to build resilient, future-ready businesses," said Jessica Alsford, chief sustainability officer and chair of the Institute for Sustainable Investing at

Morgan Stanley in the report.

Companies in the Region are among those with a green mindset.

- Ozinga is building a manufacturing facility in East Chicago that will produce 1 million tons of low-carbon cement annually and create 150 long-term jobs.
- NiSource earned a spot on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices for the 11th consecutive year, receiving high marks for its climate strategy and business ethics.
- FiberX in Merrillville uses corn stover to promote biofuels and other uses.
- EarthWise in Valparaiso uses a proprietary system to transform cow manure into organic nitrogen fertilizer.
- Erosion & Construction Solutions' Siltworm product mitigates

erosion and controls sediment while maintaining an environmentally friendly construction site.

Other companies like Hitachi Global Air Power are determined to find solutions to product waste.

"I believe we're smart enough to figure this out," Communication Manager Jennifer Ohlinger said.

"We're in this sustainability revolution. It's the 21st century. We learned from the industrial revolution and made this great progress."

### Nexus W2V

**A**t Kingsbury Industrial Plant in LaPorte County, Nexus W2V is building a plant to turn food waste into synthetic natural gas, a sort of ecological alchemy.

CEO Roshan Vani said 35% of waste



is organic, so plants like the one under construction in Kingsbury not only create important fuels but also extend the life of landfills by diverting organic waste.

“Landfill gas has been around a long time,” he said. “We’re just kind of accelerating that (process).”

His company’s work is important, he said, because new landfills are not opening.

“We effectively anaerobically digest the organic waste to make a biomethane,” getting it to pipeline-quality specifications, Vani said.

Truckloads from hospitals, prisons, schools and other sources will bring food waste to the plant, where it will go through a screen to pluck out plastics and other inorganic materials that will be diverted to a landfill. Then the waste will go through the anaerobic digestion process until it emerges as synthetic natural gas to feed into a NIPSCO pipeline at the site.

The plant is expected to be completed this summer with the first gas into the pipeline in November.

“It’s always challenging in the board room” to solve environmental issues, Vani said, but Nexus doesn’t shy away.

### Forever Analytical

**H**unter MacMillan, cofounder and CEO of Forever Analytical in South Bend, was a graduate student under University of Notre Dame chemistry and physics professor Graham Peaslee, a global expert in PFAS, the “forever chemical” plastics.

That experience prompted MacMillan to start a PFAS detection lab to get quicker results for customers.

Part of that speed comes from the ability to send the labs to the samples and not just the other way around.

Typically, a traditional lab will receive samples, require a water sample, drinking water or some other substance, to be shipped on ice for analysis in the lab.

There’s so much demand that it can take four to six weeks for results, MacMillan said. His company brings detection closer to the source, reducing the time to make critical decisions in the field.

Most measure a small subset of PFAS,

he said, while his company’s thorough testing can get a larger picture than other methods.

Forever Analytical is developing field sensors to do measurements almost in real time, MacMillan said.

“Part of addressing the problem is being able to know there is a problem,” he said. “We want to be the front door to help you make decisions.”

Increased public awareness will influence consumer purchasing decisions, MacMillan hopes.

PFAS are in many products. He pointed out, “We’re talking about children’s products, cookware, firefighter gear” and more.

“We’re building out a consumer products database that’s going to be online so people can go out and search these products,” based on test results, he said. Clients need to agree before their products are included.

### Legacy Environmental

**A**t St. John-based Legacy Environmental, Carl and Lorrie Lisek are focused on environmental benefits. With their two sons, they also operate Drive Clean Indiana, which aims to reduce pollution through the use of cleaner fuels for vehicles.

Carl had worked on environmental cleanups throughout the United States, so they founded Legacy in 2003.

“Our conversation, literally, was how do we prevent those cleanups from happening,” Lorrie said. “We were green before green was cool.”

“We worked with various state and federal programs available in Northwest Indiana” to eliminate waste and use greener products, Carl explained.

East Chicago, despite its reputation as an environmentally tainted city, became one of the first Hoosier communities to use biofuels for its fleet.

“This was all before a lot of the alternative fuel craze,” Carl said.

From the city, the Liseks moved to East Chicago schools, partnering with them for central fueling.

“It just kind of blossomed from there,” Carl said.

Ozinga’s transition to alternative fuels began with South Shore Clean Cities, transitioning its fleet of concrete trucks and other vehicles in several states to natural gas.

Drive Clean Indiana has helped several municipalities upgrade fleets, including Hobart, Portage, Michigan City, Gary, East Chicago and Munster.

“Last year, I would say, was probably our best year,” Carl said, with over \$50 million in grants statewide for clean transportation.

Sustainability is important to the Liseks,

but also to others. “We as a Region are starting to think strategically and larger,” he said, with proposals for a Chicago Bears stadium as examples of thinking big.

“Sustainability will continue. There’s a grassroots effort for many people who want to do the right thing. They want better air quality. They want better water,” Carl said.

“For a company, it has to make sense for the bottom line as well,” Lorrie said.

### Hitachi Global Air Power

**H**itachi Global Air Power is, as its name implies, a global company. Director of Sustainability Katrina Saucier said being a large company makes a difference.

In an international corporation, “you think about things in a much bigger way because you’re not just in such a micro bubble,” she said. “From a sustainability perspective, that’s great,” examining how decisions impact customers, distributors, customers, community and the environment.



**“We’re in this sustainability revolution. It’s the 21st century. We learned from the industrial revolution and made this great progress.”**

— Jennifer Ohlinger  
Hitachi Global Air Power

“It’s great to be part of an organization that walks the talk,” added Senior Communications Manager Jennifer Ohlinger.

With a goal of being carbon neutral by 2030, Hitachi is deliberate about sustainability.

“We don’t have to choose between sustainability and making money,” Saucier said.

Instead, it’s about making sure solutions and how they’re offered to the market contribute positively to society.

“It’s playing out in basically every business function possible,” Saucier said.

In March, for the first time ever, Hitachi began exhibiting portable air compressors that run on electric rather than diesel.

“This is an entire product line that we have developed using sustainability,” she said.

Diesel has its uses where electricity is inaccessible, but customers now have the option to choose a cleaner fuel source.

Remanufacturing is a big part of Hitachi’s business model.

“(Our compressors) not only have a first life, but they also have a second and a third life,” Saucier said, performing at the same level as the first month they’re plugged in.

In La Porte County, Hitachi has begun a native plant project. Using native plants means less mowing, allowing the maintenance team to focus on other needs. Because of native plants’ deep roots, lawns stay healthy without requiring as much water as traditional lawns.

The LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District offered a grant for the project.

Other Hitachi sustainability initiatives are as simple as arranging fewer garbage truck visits to make sure the dumpsters are as full as possible before they’re emptied.

**Arkos Design**

As a principal and landscape architect at Mishawaka-based Arkos Design, Darla Aldred is concerned about how to use natural features to best effect at building sites. Biophilic design is a passion for Aldred. It integrates natural features that some believe help mental health.



“We as a firm definitely try to integrate sustainable materials and sustainable systems as much as possible,” she said.

Making this happen for clients involves showing financial sustainability, not just the impact on the environment, Aldred said. “How can we do design that helps people connect to nature” and help ourselves in the process?

Aldred’s realm is the outdoors. “There are ways to help move

forward more environmentally friendly things without huge costs to the client.”

That includes parking lot design, how it flows and functions for people in cars.

“There are ways to design a parking lot to help stormwater management that isn’t costlier to the client,” she said. “It’s more thoughtful design.”

Draining to a center median can be more useful than a detention pond.

“It is working through a nature system to help filter all those pollutants from the parking,” Aldred said. “Those bioswales are full of hope, if we’re able to do so, native plant materials.” They improve soils and attract pollinators, birds, all wildlife, flora and fauna.

“We love it for the clients willing to

consider it,” she said.

But that takes some education for clients.

“They don’t want to have what they see as weed-filled areas and things like that.”

From the very first meeting with clients, Arkos Design talks about goals from a sustainable standpoint.

“I think most clients are receptive to doing those types of things,” Aldred said.

Arkos introduces these ideas and provides a level of cost impact as the design process goes forward. Aldred gave an example of a carpet that is LEED-certified.

“The cost is no different than if you chose the one that didn’t have all of that.”

For more complex things like stormwater management, calculating the cost might be trickier. Preparing land for bioswales can cost more up front, but long-term maintenance is reduced.

“Landscape architecture is a great way if you really want to focus in on environmental sustainability,” Aldred said. “It’s an integrated part of our design here.”

The Notre Dame campus is one example. The sustainable lawn’s turf is “stronger, tougher than bluegrass” and more environmentally friendly.

Arkos Design’s buildings incorporate sustainability in many ways. Alumni Hall at Notre Dame has a green roof. “It’s a small roof, but for Notre Dame, it was a fun little project to do.”

Light-colored roofs absorb less heat and can reflect light onto the bottom of bifacial solar panels mounting on the roof. Colors can help brighten spaces, and louvers on windows can control the

amount of sunlight that comes in. Rain gardens can help manage stormwater better.

The list of options goes on and on.

**“There are ways to help move forward more environmentally friendly things without huge costs to the client.”**

— Darla Aldred  
Arkos Design

**“Once you’re in the water and you have that connection with the ocean, you want to protect it”**

— Jamie Dietrich  
Blue Adaptation



## Blue Adaptation

Jamie Dietrich, founder of Bremen-based Blue Adaptation, is swimming in sustainability. Dietrich designs and sells environmentally friendly swimwear with ocean-inspired designs.

Though she lives far from the ocean, she's never been freshwater diving. The ocean draws her to it.

A Hawaii vacation allowed her to swim in something besides a pool. "I always call it the other half of heaven because it's just so beautiful," Dietrich said.

"I always had a design-oriented mind," she said. That brought Blue Adaptation to reality.

The fashion industry isn't known for sustainability. Fast fashion and over-consumption are the norm.

"You see a print for a season, like fall, and you see it disappear," Dietrich said. "It ends in a third-party retailer or worse."

Her swimwear is made in small batches with dye sublimation that doesn't harm the environment. The



Photo provided by Arkos Design

**Alumni Hall's new green roof serves as a layer of living infrastructure, marrying University of Notre Dame's historic campus heritage with modern sustainable design.**

factory in Europe she contracts with uses what is in effect 50-inch printer paper to print her designs, put them on fabric and use a heat process to permanently transfer the design to fabric. The paper is recycled when it's done.

"My customer base is generally scuba

divers," especially females.

"Once you're in the water and you have that connection with the ocean, you want to protect it," Dietrich said. "Once you get down there, you want this to last. You want your grandchildren to see where these coral reefs are." ■

2801 Evans Ave, Door 17, Valparaiso, IN 46383

@SecureShredNWI

SecureShred.org

219-476-1905



SECURE  
SHRED

Security You Trust.  
Recycling You Can  
Feel Good About.

Bulk pick-up available for electronics.



# Economic power of play



Hundreds participate in the Regional American Taekwondo Association at the Hammond Sportsplex in August 2025.

Photo provided by Nick Eishire, South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority

## Region capitalizes on youth sports trend to drive tourism

MICHAEL PUENTE

If you walk into a hotel lobby in Merrillville, Hammond, Elkhart or Crown Point most weekends, you'll find a scene that has become familiar and economically vital. Teams of young athletes lounging in warm-ups, parents hauling duffel bags, and coaches strategizing over bagels and coffee.

They're checking in, checking out, eating, shopping, exploring — and together, they are fueling one of the Region's fastest-growing economic engines.

Youth sports have evolved into a competitive tourism industry with national reach and multi-million-dollar implications. For Northwest Indiana, they're no longer a sideshow. They're center stage.

### Economic engine

Few understand the scale better than Jimmy Nelson, director of sports for the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority. Nelson oversees the sports-tourism portfolio for Lake

County, but his job requires monitoring everything happening across Northwest Indiana.

No other CVB in the Region employs a full-time sports specialist — a detail that underscores the growing complexity of the field.

"I have to keep my finger on the pulse of anything sports related in Northwest Indiana and most importantly in Lake County," Nelson said.

On the desk in his office sits a binder thick enough to rival a college textbook: the working calendar of youth and amateur sports tournaments slated for 2026.

It lists 114 events — and Nelson is quick to point out it's far from exhaustive. Some organizations don't like to share information for fear other organizations might like to compete to host them.

"But even with what we do know, the economic activity is enormous," he said.

In April 2025, the Ohio-based Sports Event & Tourism Association reported that some \$47.1 billion in direct

spending with a total economic impact of \$114.4 billion was generated by sports tourism. The industry supports almost 665,000 full- and part-time jobs across the country.

Those numbers are just expected to get larger over the next decade, Nelson said. "We've seen it all around us. Everywhere you look, it seems like different communities are seeing those numbers and going, 'We need to put a sports complex,'" Nelson said. "That's whether it's outdoor sports, indoor sports and attracting those tournaments on weekends to help pay those bills and get them in our hotels."

Those 114 youth sport events planned for Northwest Indiana in 2026 are primarily baseball, softball, swimming and volleyball.

"If they all come through, that could generate in the ballpark of \$45 million in this area," Nelson said. "Sports tourism is such a hot topic, and it's not going anywhere. It survived COVID. It's going to keep going."



## Tournament play

According to Nelson, Northwest Indiana is home to an estimated 5,000 hotel rooms, a number that is expected to grow as tourism increases.

One of the events that helps fill those rooms is the Cal Ripken World Series for 11-year-olds scheduled for August in Crown Point.

“It’s only 24 teams, but they’re from the entire world. You’ll have at least six teams that come from outside the country and multiple teams from outside the state. They’re staying in Northwest Indiana for an entire week,” Nelson said. “The Australian team two years ago stayed here for 11 days. That’s a lot of trips to the waterpark, to the mall, to the restaurants. That’s a lot of shopping for those kids.”

Other events include the National Softball Association World Series in Crown Point in July, with some games played in Schererville and La Porte.

“There are 150 teams, sometimes up to 200 teams, in this area for seven days at a time. It’s even bigger than the 24 teams of the Cal Ripken World Series,” Nelson said.

Even college football has a home in Northwest Indiana.

In the NCAA Division II, there is the Albanese Candy Bowl that is played in December at the Brickie Bowl in Hobart.

## Rising star: aquatics

While Lake County thrives on multi-sport complexes and baseball traditions, Elkhart County has quietly built a powerhouse of its own — in swimming.

The Elkhart Health & Aquatics Center, which opened in 2019, boasts one of the largest competitive pools in the country. Its size and amenities instantly positioned Elkhart to attract high-level meets.

“We host at least one or two major swim meets a year,” said Terry Mark, director of communications for the Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau. “College championships, national meets — anywhere from 500 to nearly 1,000 competitors.”

Each meet lasts three or four days. And unlike with some sports, swim teams stay together for the entire duration.

“You’re multiplying athletes, coaches, families, volunteers — all staying for several nights,” Mark said. “That’s thousands of room nights, plus dining and everything else visitors need.”

The aquatics center was born from a rare coalition of community organizations, including Beacon Health System, the Elkhart Community Schools and the Community Foundation of Elkhart County. The Region had lost its YMCA, and local schools faced mounting pool-maintenance costs. The combined effort produced not just a community amenity but a revenue-generating tourism asset.

Today, the facility hums with activity: fitness classes, recreational users, pickleball games, swim clubs and regional tournaments.

“It’s a beehive of activity,” Mark said. “And swimming is only one piece of it.”

In early March, the center hosted the NAIA National Women’s Swimming and Division championship. That’s 500 to 600 swimmers, he said.

Other college-level swim meets also have made their way to Elkhart, including the Great Lakes Valley Conference, and the College Swimming & Diving Coaches Association of America swim meets.

“All of these events are anywhere from 500 to close to a thousand competitors,” Mark said. “I think the decision was to both build a swimming facility that would serve the community needs but also to generate a revenue source and

that opportunity to attract larger events.”

The competitions often happen during winter or colder months, usually a down time for visitors to the area.

“This brings in hundreds and hundreds of visitors in a time when visitation is historically lower because it’s winter,” Mark said.

Hotels usually aren’t full during these months, so it is a boom for them.

“We’re able to bring in anywhere from a few thousand room nights to cover this event. That’s a significant boost for those businesses,” Mark said. “But then you also have the spillover into dining and all the services products that visitors, swim teams would need to support them over a course of a three- to four-day visit.”

## Girls-sports revolution

Youth sports are evolving — not just in scale but in purpose. Nowhere is that more evident than at Marvella Sports, a new sports campus opening at Fair Oaks Farms with a mission unlike anything else in the country.

Marvella Sports is designed exclusively for young female athletes, blending elite sports training with leadership development, mental-health support and family-friendly amenities.

Marvella Sports is named after Marvella Bayh, the wife of the late U.S. Sen. Birch Bayh, a Democrat from Indiana, who championed the Title IX



The Elkhart Health & Aquatics Center hosts collegiate level swimming competitions.

Photo provided by the Elkhart Health & Aquatics

## TOURISM & RECREATION

law banning gender discrimination in education in 1972. Birch and Marvella are the parents of former Indiana U.S. Sen. and Gov. Evan Bayh.

Glenn Tilley, founder and chief operating officer for Marvella Sports, said the idea grew from three motivations. First, his experience leading youth baseball for Cal Ripken showed him the gaps in the system. Second, as a father to a daughter who played club and college lacrosse, he saw firsthand that girls often lacked equal access to resources and facilities. Third, the research was undeniable.

“Girls who play sports are less likely to struggle with mental health issues, more likely to be in healthy relationships, and

more likely to become leaders,” Tilley said. “Ninety-four percent of women in executive roles attribute their success to sports.”

Yet despite the data, Tilley discovered no large-scale youth sports complexes in the U.S. dedicated solely to girls.

“So, we decided to build it,” he said.

Marvella Sports will host basketball, volleyball, soccer, lacrosse, flag football and softball. The campus will include a massive

indoor athletic facility, an indoor training center, community rooms, a research-focused athlete development program, and design features tailored specifically to girls — from locker rooms to rest areas to safety considerations.

“We built an environment that’s

welcoming, private, secure and purpose-driven,” Tilley said. “You can drive in on Friday and not get back in your car until Sunday or Monday. Everything is walkable.”

The scale of opportunity is staggering. Within Indiana and Illinois alone, Tilley estimates 900,000 girls participate in youth sports. Within a three- to five-hour drive, the potential market jumps to 2.2 million female athletes.

The State of Indiana has taken notice. Over the next 25 years, Indiana Sports Corp. has named women’s and youth sports one of its five strategic pillars — and Marvella could be a national showcase.

“The marketplace can easily support this,” Tilley said. “And the mission is more important than ever. Girls are facing mental health challenges at alarming rates. Sports can help.”

Tilley anticipates the complex will drive economic development well beyond its home at Fair Oaks Farm in Newton County.

“It will have a significant economic impact on the community. It could

**“ Girls who play sports are less likely to struggle with mental health issues, more likely to be in healthy relationships, and more likely to become leaders. Ninety-four percent of women in executive roles attribute their success to sports.”**

— Glenn Tilley  
Marvella Sports

## Ψ INDIANA UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST

Ψ  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS  
AND ECONOMICS  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST



# MASTER of BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

- Flexible Scheduling
- Lean Six Sigma Green Belt Certificate
- International Business Trip

*Experience Global Business, Apply It Locally*



*Scan & Apply today!*

Questions? Let us know  
sraudry@iu.edu  
219-981-5698



impact the Crown Point area,” Tilley said. “I can tell you already, we’re going to need additional hotel rooms.”

Tilley said the complex is eyeing a late spring or early summer partial opening.

### Hammond Sportsplex

If Marvella represents the future, the Hammond Sportsplex is proof that the present remains incredibly strong.

Opened in 2018, the Sportsplex quickly has become one of the busiest athletic facilities in the Midwest. In November, the Sportsplex completed an expansion that brings it to an eye-popping scale:

- 20 volleyball courts
- 10 basketball courts
- 3 indoor soccer fields
- 4 outdoor sand volleyball courts

The Sportsplex has its own in-house teams and leagues along with travel clubs with hundreds of children and teenagers participating, said Kymberli Roberts, Sportsplex general manager.

The center also hosts its own tournaments that can attract up to 160



The Cal Ripken World Series for 11-year-olds is scheduled for August in Crown Point.

Provided by South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority

teams for volleyball from throughout the Midwest.

In February, the center hosted Division I and Division II collegiate club volleyball teams from schools such as the University Notre Dame, Iowa State University, University of Michigan and University of Cincinnati.

“We had 30 teams, and they all stayed

at our local hotels,” Roberts said. “They got gas, ate at our local restaurants. So, it’s a pretty big impact on our local economy for those days. I don’t have exact numbers, but we know that everyone stayed in a hotel that weekend.”

In April, the center will host dozens of basketball teams from across the country with NextPro Sports and Puma.

**PRECISION** — ★ ★ ★ —  
**MACHINING, REPAIR &  
FABRICATION SERVICES**

A modern manufacturing facility offering customers high-quality replacement parts, mechanical repairs and fabricating at affordable prices and delivery.

**AMERICAN  
PRECISION SERVICES**

(219) 977-4451  
WWW.AMPRSERVICES.COM

## TOURISM & RECREATION

“We have a couple of cool tournaments every few years, and we get a very big reach across the country,” Roberts said. “We hosted our own MLK tournament where we had a lot of local colleges participate. We also had a team from Las Vegas.”

But the Sportsplex’s success wasn’t a sure thing.

When basketball courts in Merrillville closed in 2014, Hammond Mayor Tom

Roberts said. “As soon as we opened our doors, tournament directors flooded in. There was such a need for not just Hammond but Northwest Indiana. There is such a need for this type of space.”

### Defining Region

From aquatics to softball, volleyball to lacrosse, Northwest Indiana has embraced youth sports as a defining

Sports tourism is steady. It’s recession resistant. It fills hotel rooms even in the coldest months. And it brings families — visitors who spend money across multiple categories, often repeatedly, as kids progress through seasons and age groups.

But beyond the dollars, there’s something deeper: identity.

Youth sports give Northwest Indiana something to celebrate and something to build around. They bring national visibility to communities that rarely receive it. They create opportunities for local families and pathways for young athletes. And they unite cities across the Region around a shared investment in the next generation.

“When you talk about tourism in Northwest Indiana, you almost have to talk about sports,” Nelson said. “That is a big, big critical key to what’s happening in Northwest Indiana with the growth all around here.”

In reality, youth sports aren’t just part of the Region’s economic strategy. It might be its most powerful play. ■

**“As soon as we opened our doors, tournament directors flooded in. There was such a need for not just Hammond but Northwest Indiana. There is such a need for this type of space.”**

— Kymberli Roberts  
Hammond Sportsplex.



McDermott Jr. drove past the shuttered facilities on a trip and immediately recognized a regional void.

“There was nowhere for kids to play,”

industry — one that supports hotels, restaurants, retail, transportation and tourism all year long.

The economic rationale is obvious.



### QUALITY CONSTRUCTION SINCE 1908

- DESIGN / BUILD
- CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT
- GENERAL CONTRACTING
- FACILITY SERVICES
- PRE-CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

Choose Larson-Danielson for quality, cost-effective, and timely project delivery. Experience exceptional value and professionalism, contact us!

219-362-2127  
[www.ldconstruction.com](http://www.ldconstruction.com)



# Heart Milestones

Powers Health cardiovascular experts lead the way in minimally invasive advancements

Powers Health has established itself as a leader in cardiovascular innovation in Northwest Indiana and in the state, frequently introducing minimally invasive procedures and advanced technologies. Here is a look at some of the groundbreaking procedures and firsts at Powers Health:

## STRUCTURAL HEART

### Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR)

TAVR is a less invasive option for the treatment of aortic stenosis. It saves patients from the rigors of a complex open-heart procedure and provides quicker recovery.

The Powers Health Structural Heart and Valve team was a pioneer of the TAVR program and is one of the most experienced in the Chicagoland area.

Community Hospital has been awarded the American College of Cardiology's Transcatheter Valve Certification based on evaluation of the staff's ability to meet standards for multidisciplinary teams, formalized training, shared decision-making and registry performance.



### Tricuspid Edge-to-Edge Repair (TEER)

TEER is an option for people with often debilitating tricuspid regurgitation, where the valve between the right ventricle and right atrium does not close properly, allowing blood to flow backward into the right atrium forcing the heart to work harder to move blood to the body. Left untreated, tricuspid regurgitation may lead to other conditions, such as atrial fibrillation (AFib) or heart failure. The TriClip device is delivered via the femoral vein and clips together tricuspid valve leaflets to reduce backward blood flow.

### Tricuspid Valve Replacement (TTVR)

The Structural Heart team at Powers Health continues to offer groundbreaking heart valve replacement procedures with for patients with severe symptomatic tricuspid regurgitation. The EVOQUE system is the world's first TTVR device, designed to improve the quality of life in these patients without the need for open heart surgery. The device is threaded through the femoral vein to the heart and deployed in the valve, fully replacing the weakened area without removing the valve.

## HEART FAILURE

### Cordella Heart Failure System Implant

In January 2026, Powers Health completed its first Cordella Heart Failure System implant. The implant helps patients



who have heart failure by measuring their pulmonary artery pressure and vital signs from the comfort of home and allowing clinicians to access that data remotely.

## PERIPHERAL ARTERY DISEASE (PAD)

### Percutaneous Transluminal Arterial Bypass (PTAB)

PTAB is an effective option for patients with lower extremity PAD. This is geared for PAD patients who have not improved with other interventions, such as a stent, or are not good candidates for open surgical bypass.

The PTAB procedure creates a new pathway for blood flow using the femoral vein to bypass long, complex blockages in the arteries of the leg.

### TransCarotid Artery Revascularization (TCAR)

TCAR treats carotid artery disease and prevents future strokes. This direct transcarotid stent placement option provides best-in-class neuroprotection in a more-efficient and less-invasive approach compared to traditional carotid endarterectomy (CEA).

## ATRIAL FIBRILLATION (AFib)

### Pulsed Field Ablation

Pulsed field ablation delivers targeted electrical pulses to treat areas of heart tissue that cause AFib. In a traditional ablation, extreme heat or cold is applied via catheter to areas of the heart associated with abnormal heart rhythms. The new approach uses electric fields to treat those areas of the heart. This non-thermal approach is proven to be an effective option for patients while minimizing the risk of damaging surrounding tissue.

### Left Atrial Appendage Occlusion (LAAO) – WATCHMAN FLX

People diagnosed with non-valvular AFib are at higher risk for stroke. These patients typically are prescribed blood thinners to reduce that risk. WATCHMAN FLX is an alternative to reduce the risk of stroke while reducing the risks associated with taking blood thinners. WATCHMAN FLX is a one-time, minimally invasive implant that blocks the left atrial appendage to eliminate the source of most AFib-related clots.

**For more information about cardiovascular care at Powers Health, visit [PowersHealth.org/heart](https://PowersHealth.org/heart).**

# LEADER PROFILE

## Essential adviser



SHARE STORY ON PHONE

### enFocus director teaches startups how to turn ideas into money-making businesses

TED SLOWIK

**B**lessing Mene might have moved to the Region to support his wife's education at the University of Notre Dame. But he also brought international expertise that is helping entrepreneurs succeed.

As director of entrepreneurship for enFocus, the Nigerian native works with startups and shares his expertise about launching businesses.

Since its founding in 2012, South Bend-based enFocus has worked to connect recent graduates with civic groups, nonprofit organizations and for-profit companies hungry for talent with fresh ideas.

Mene, who joined enFocus in early 2024, helps aspiring business leaders learn how to pursue investors, sharpen their business plans and turn innovative concepts into real-world economic ventures.

Mene's contributions as director of entrepreneurship are making a difference in the business community, said Andrew Wiand, EnFocus president.

"Blessing's work at enFocus reinforces the critical role entrepreneurship plays in strengthening the South Bend-Elkhart region, an area with a long and proud history of innovation and enterprise," Wiand said.

"We see this work as essential to the region's future, and Blessing plays an important role in making it happen."

Mene is cofounder and CEO of Vetsark, a financial technology company that helps African farmers gain access to capital and other tools to grow their businesses.

Throughout his professional career, Mene has supported more than 100 startups, small and medium enterprises and nonprofits. He also has fundraised more than \$25 million in venture capital investments and donor grants. He has trained more than 2,000 businesses

and nonprofits in specialties covering entrepreneurship, innovation, fundraising, leadership development and other topics.

Big-tech heavyweights have recognized Mene's work. He was awarded the Google Impact Challenge Public Choice Prize for his work in Nigeria and was named a 2020 Goalkeepers Rebuilder by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

He earned a master's degree in entrepreneurship and innovation from Valencia International University and Rome Business School Nigeria. He earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry and education from the Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria.

Mene says fundraising is not just about money, that it's about building a "fundable" and impactful organization. He serves as a director and adviser to startups and organizations looking to sharpen their fundraising story, validate their business model, achieve profitability, and design strategies for long-term growth.

**"It's a fundraising game that teaches you about raising capital and all those other things."**

"I guide regional organizations to establish successful strategies," Mene said. "I bring that skill to the table, to develop profitable, scalable companies."

Since Mene's work involves teaching recent graduates how to become successful entrepreneurs, it makes sense that he's eager to talk about how he is developing an entrepreneurship board game.

"It's a fundraising game that teaches you about raising capital and all those other things," Mene said. "This simulation is a board game to help teach the business of equity investment to colleges and high schools across Indiana."

Mene's wife, Cynthia Mene, shares his passion for promoting social entrepreneurship. She is CEO and co-founder of Inspire Africa, a nonprofit that teaches entrepreneurship skills to youths. She serves as an international consultant for the World Bank Group and is a McKinsey Next Generation Women Leaders Fellow, according to her LinkedIn profile.

Mene's work with enFocus involves shepherding along various projects and initiatives proposed by aspiring entrepreneurs that he refers to as fellows. Projects represent a variety of business sectors, including agriculture, sustainability and green energy.

"One fellow is working on a hydroponic system that allows people to grow crops and vegetables within your houses, indoors," Mene said. "It's really very efficient."

Blessing oversees a portfolio of 15 to 20 entrepreneurial projects where innovation fellows complete activities to advance the commercialization potential of each startup, Wiand said.

"The projects involve a combination of customer validation, solution development and piloting/testing of novel solutions," he said. "Through this work, he brings a thoughtful, analytical approach to supporting entrepreneurs as they assess viability and move ideas toward success.

"Mene's ability to connect big-picture regional goals with practical, on-the-ground support makes him a valuable contributor to enFocus and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem." ■



Photo provided by EnFocus

► Blessing Mene is director of entrepreneurship for EnFocus.

# Answering the call



Crown Point answering service provides professional response — no matter the hour

MARIE WILSON

**S**herry Langdeau and Tabetha Alvarado like to say they went to school at work, and it prepared them perfectly to become entrepreneurs.

The Crown Point residents together run Great Lakes Communications, an answering service that handles calls 24/7 for companies throughout the Region and the country — and impresses clients with its responsiveness and accountability.

Great Lakes Communications, based in Crown Point and known as GLC, has been in business since 2015. The company provides a real-time response to calls received by businesses, service companies, doctors, nonprofits, religious organizations and even crisis hotlines.

“We never close; we’re always open,” said Langdeau, who has been working in the answering service industry since 1999. “We provide that relief to the business owners. They know they can leave at the end of the day, and we’ll take their calls, and they don’t have to worry about missing calls. Because missed calls is missing revenue.”

GLC’s owners met in 2002 when Langdeau’s team at a local answering company initially passed over hiring Alvarado. Landeau thought she was “too pushy,” but a different candidate didn’t work out. So, Alvarado got her chance.

“At the time, I was selling perfume on the streets, which was not great,” said Alvarado, who decided college wasn’t for her because she felt too many required classes were irrelevant. “I was like, ‘I want an inside job where I talk. I like talking.’”

The role was a fit, so the pair continued their on-the-job learning, taking calls and building industry knowledge. When their employer passed away and successors closed the business, Langdeau and

Alvarado saw an opportunity to start their own venture. The idea was to provide customized answering services “and do it a little better,” Langdeau said.

Early challenges included finding employees who could understand the evolving technological side of answering calls, inputting key details and dispatching service. Younger workers usually proved a better fit.

Now, technological know-how isn’t so hard to find, but conversational ability is, GLC’s owners said. Hiring younger generations comes with the responsibility of training workers to speak professionally, listen accurately, ask questions and empathize with the stress of frustrating situations.

As women entrepreneurs, GLC’s leaders see themselves as skilled multitaskers who can truly understand callers’ problems, whether it’s a floor drain backing up into a finished basement or a baby screaming with a fever.

“We can empathize with whatever they’re calling about. We can feel what they’re feeling. We can let them know and reassure them that we are here; we’re here to help. It’s very comforting,” Langdeau said. “We train our agents to answer the phones how we answer the phones.”

These relational skills are the benefits that live answering agents at GLC bring over automated services through artificial intelligence, Langdeau and Alvarado said.

“It’s what’s missing in society, because a lot of people can’t handle one conversation — and here we’re having them one after another,” Alvarado said. “And it brings that human connection with our clients’ callers.”

GLC aims to sustain other businesses as an extension of their team, helping ensure startups and growing businesses don’t miss opportunities. The service’s smallest client package starts at \$30 a

month — and still provides 24/7 answering coverage.

Support from GLC proved vital early this year to Dan Wood Co., a plumbing, heating and cooling service provider based in Portage, Michigan.

Manager Monica Schriemer said temperatures were rising out of a deep freeze when 5 p.m. on a Friday rolled around, and calls were set to be handled by GLC over the weekend.



Photo provided by Monica Schriemer

► Monica Schriemer

The GLC team took 60 calls for Dan Wood Co. before regular business hours began again Monday morning, 40 of them requiring dispatch of emergency services. Schriemer said she reached out to Langdeau and Alvarado twice during the high-call-volume weekend to change plans and better handle the influx of emergencies, “and they immediately responded with their full support.”

“Their flexibility, teamwork and commitment were instrumental in preventing what could have been an overwhelming and chaotic weekend from becoming a disaster,” Schriemer said. “Despite supporting multiple businesses, they were willing to adapt quickly, collaborate in real time and adjust their normal procedures to help us manage an unusually demanding situation.”

GLC plans to stay nimble and continue supporting businesses of all sizes, answering whatever calls may come, no matter the time.

“Nowadays, everyone expects to get an answer — now,” Langdeau said. “We can answer for any client. It doesn’t matter what your business is. Every business needs an answering service.” ■

MADE IN INDIANA

# Nozzle worth noting



Photo provided by Jason Gour

Elkhart Brass Manufacturing's XD Glow-in-the-Dark Smooth Bore Nozzle is used by the Elkhart Fire Department.

## Elkhart Brass epitome of best in manufacturing, says Indiana Chamber leader

KERRY SAPET

In a statewide contest spotlighting the best of Indiana products, the winner wasn't a flashy consumer gadget or a high-tech app.

Instead, the title of 2025 Coolest Thing Made IN Indiana went to a tool built for the most extreme conditions imaginable: a glow-in-the-dark fire-hose nozzle made by Elkhart Brass Manufacturing.

"Firefighting in real life isn't how you see it in movies or on TV," said Chris Martin, Elkhart Brass vice president of marketing. "It's hot, it's dirty, and most of the time you're in the dark. This nozzle gives firefighters an embedded sense of safety. You can find it and

operate it when seconds matter."

The XD Glow-in-the-Dark Smooth Bore Nozzle, designed and built in Elkhart, outlasted 48 competing products from 36 Indiana communities to win the fan-voted, single-elimination tournament hosted by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. The nozzle bested products ranging from space satellites to gourmet pie mixes to pipe organs.

Public voting closed Jan. 15, and the winner was announced Feb. 4 at the chamber's Best in Business Awards luncheon at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

For Elkhart Brass, a company founded in 1902, the recognition was both

surprising and affirming.

"We saw the contest and thought, 'we make something cool — it would be neat to see what happens,'" Martin said. "We knew we had a good product, but we also knew the competition would be tough."

### Saving lives

The XD in the nozzle's name stands for "extreme duty." The name is well earned. The nozzle is engineered to withstand intense heat, impact, and stress on the fire ground.

"Firefighters are usually pretty hard on equipment," Martin said. "Making something that can be repeatedly dropped, dragged, put back on the truck and reused is important."

The nozzle's integrated glow-in-the-dark components helped propel it to victory in the contest. The nozzle's tip and handle emit a steady luminescence that helps firefighters quickly locate and orient their most critical tool in zero-visibility environments.

"The nozzle incorporates many proven features we've relied on for years, with the added benefit of a glow-in-the-dark design," said Jason Gour, division chief of operations for the Elkhart Fire Department. "That enhancement improves visibility in IDLH (immediately dangerous to life or health) environments, in which we routinely operate."

Elkhart Brass and the Elkhart Fire Department have a longstanding partnership, with research and development serving as a key component.

### Community support

While the product's design and performance impressed voters, Martin said the company's deep ties to the firefighting community made the difference. "I honestly didn't think we'd get this

far," Martin said. "But we have a massive community of firefighters and first responders who use our products. They shared it, supported our brand and really showed up for us."

Elkhart Brass sells firefighting equipment all over the world, but the XD nozzle is primarily used in the United States and is the company's most popular product. Tens of thousands have been sold, making it a familiar and trusted piece of equipment for fire departments nationwide.

"This is a life-saving piece of equipment," Martin said. "It could make or break an incident for a fire department."

### Redefining manufacturing

The Coolest Thing Made IN Indiana contest, now in its fifth year, was created to celebrate the state's manufacturing sector and the people behind it. While Indiana is often associated with traditional industries like steel and automotive production, the competition highlights how manufacturing has evolved.

That evolution is embodied by Elkhart Brass. With over 2,000 firefighting and fire protection products in its catalog, the company blends old-school craftsmanship with modern engineering, all while maintaining its headquarters and manufacturing base in Elkhart.

"Elkhart Brass Manufacturing represents the very best of Indiana manufacturing: innovation with real-world impact," said Vanessa Green Sindors, Indiana Chamber of Commerce president and CEO. "Their glow-in-the-dark nozzle is not only an impressive product, but also a lifesaving tool for firefighters that underscores how Hoosier manufacturers are solving critical challenges every day."

The XD Glow-in-the-Dark Smooth Bore Nozzle may be designed for moments when visibility disappears, but its win casts a bright light on Indiana's manufacturing ingenuity — and on a 124-year-old company still finding new ways to innovate when lives are on the line. ■



SHARE STORY ON PHONE

# BUSINESS DIRECTORY

**BIGGBY**  
makes it better

Now franchising in Northwest Indiana

For franchise information, visit [www.biggbyfranchising.com](http://www.biggbyfranchising.com)

**JRS MAR/COM**

MARKETING THAT DRIVES RESULTS  
A TEAM YOU CAN TRUST

**JOE SKIBBIE**  
Director  
(312) 339-9359  
[info@jrsmarcom.com](mailto:info@jrsmarcom.com)

#BESEEN  
#BEHEARD

**LATITUDE**  
COMMERCIAL

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE BROKERAGE & PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

CONTACT US  
**219-864-0200**  
[WWW.LATITUDECO.COM](http://WWW.LATITUDECO.COM)

*2016 Best of Northwest Indiana Business*

**PARTNER WITH US!**  
*Your business community, your business magazine!*

**MEDIA KIT 2026**

VISIT [NWINDIANABUSINESS.COM/ABOUT/PARTNER\\_WITH\\_US](http://NWINDIANABUSINESS.COM/ABOUT/PARTNER_WITH_US) OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN MORE

**SPOTLIGHT YOUR BUSINESS** | Reach 40,000-plus readers six times a year | 219-440-6385 | [info@nwindianabusiness.com](mailto:info@nwindianabusiness.com)

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE Big on housing



## Northwest Indiana Reinvestment Alliance keeps homeowners on track

MICHAEL GONZALEZ

**F**rom a cluster of small offices in Hammond, Toyia Moore and her team at the Northwest Indiana Reinvestment Alliance are teaching people across Lake County how to manage their finances and, hopefully, own their own homes and businesses.

The agency, launched in 1989, works with banks and other lenders, county officials and other nonprofits on a sizable mission: improving the lives of Northwest Indiana residents through financial and small business education, so they can get affordable housing.

“Lake County has a big issue with housing,” Moore said. “Foreclosure numbers are increasing; evictions are increasing because the cost of living is increasing. It all boils down to financial education, awareness and resources.”

According to property data company ATTOM, Indiana was seventh in the nation for foreclosures in January.

NWIRA teaches people financial literacy, home ownership and much more, Moore said.

Affordable housing stock is relatively low, and many people struggle to find loans and other resources to get and keep their own homes, Moore said.

To help with that financial education, NWIRA deploys counselors, certified by the federal Housing and Urban Development department, across the area, holding financial literacy classes in Hammond, East Chicago, Gary and more locations.

NWIRA has been a HUD-certified counseling agency since 2008.

“We try to be in the community,” Moore said. “We’re doing classes, counseling or any kinds of services. We can come to you if you have the space.”

The bottom line is NWIRA focuses on trying to put and keep people in their own homes, Moore said. Many times, that’s meant working on individual residents’ housing problems, including

contacting lenders to help homeowners get out of a financial jam, like avoiding foreclosures.

“We’re big on housing,” she said. “We’ll do whatever it takes to keep people in their homes.”

Building partnerships with housing and lending-related organizations has been critical, Moore said. The NWIRA holds a quarterly bankers council, when a dozen local banks meet and hear from community-based organizations seeking housing and lending support.

NWIRA also hosts the monthly meetings of the Lake County Housing Task Force, where banks, local and county government officials and nonprofit leaders discuss housing, eviction rates and other issues.

“We’re a convener,” Moore said of the NWIRA. “We do strategic collaborations. We get those groups together with people who need assistance and funding.”

NWIRA also is partnering with Prosperity Indiana to teach residents about their rights. Families often lose a key part of building generational wealth, passing on their homes to loved ones, because they did not protect those long-term investments with deeds, trusts and other vehicles.

Prosperity Indiana will offer free legal services to help people get those protection devices, so they can keep their homes in their families, Moore said.

NWIRA also is partnering with United Way of Northwest Indiana and Habitat for Humanity to provide post-home purchase counseling and guidance on handling property taxes and exemptions, maintenance classes, homeowners insurance, help for financial hardships and other services, Moore said.

When people are well housed and learn to properly manage their own finances, skills that have been absent from the state’s educational system

until recently, they can open their minds up to even more possibilities, like owning their own small businesses, Moore said.

In 2017, NWIRA began connecting prospective business owners with lenders and others who can help them, Moore said. When people have reliable housing and start their own businesses, they contribute to a much stronger community, from schools to support other businesses and more, she added.

“Now, you can see other small businesses and how they were run,” Moore said. “Local banks also came out to help with micro-loans for businesses, and the banks began providing education to keep your business going.”

An important part of NWIRA’s work is letting people know help is available, especially when they fall on hard times, said NWIRA Board Member Chareice White.

“There’s a need, with the way the economy is now, with people losing jobs and being downsized, just having trouble being able to identify affordable housing, even struggling trying to afford it,” White said. “Toyia works really hard to educate people in the community.”

White said Moore’s partnerships with banks and her ability to find funding make her the right person to lead NWIRA.

“We want NWIRA to continue on the track to be able to provide resources in the community,” White said. ■



► Toyia Moore, executive director of the NWIRA, and her team provide financial literacy and homebuying courses and more.

# Business Checking, *Built for You.*

- ▶ Flexible account options
- ▶ Positive Pay check fraud protection
- ▶ Local support you can count on

Explore our business checking accounts at

[PURDUEFED.COM/BUSINESS](https://PURDUEFED.COM/BUSINESS)



**PURDUE FEDERAL**  
CREDIT UNION



**Mitch  
Gaffigan**

Account Vice President  
Northwest Indiana  
[mgaffigan@purduefed.com](mailto:mgaffigan@purduefed.com)

# Count way to success



## Northwest Indiana needs young people to study math

DON BABCOCK

**D**ebates about education often focus on reading scores, school funding or the role of technology in classrooms. Yet one subject sits quietly at the center of our national competitiveness: mathematics. The importance of young Americans studying math is not just an academic concern. It should be a strategic national priority. Student success in math or the lack of it will shape our future.

Math is the language of modern power.

Industries driving our economy rely on mathematical thinking, not

just plugging numbers into formulas. Math is used to model complex systems and interpret data to solve problems. Math is fundamental in the creation of clean energy, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence.

We would never have gotten to the moon and back without brilliant minds using complex math.

We do not all have to be rocket scientists, but we do need to encourage young people to embrace basic math early on.

International mathematics assessments show U.S. students perform in the middle of the pack compared with other nations. According to the Program for International Student Assessment, the U.S. ranked 34th among 78 countries in math in 2022.

We fall well behind countries like China, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland, Canada, Poland and many others. The global competition for talent is real. We should be treating math like the holy grail — not some unscalable mountain wall.

Over my career, I have had the opportunity to travel on international sales trips with the State of Indiana, which included a delegation of business leaders, university presidents and often the governor. Leaders of some of the countries we visited, most notably, Japan and China, were very interested in talking with our university presidents. With internationally recognized universities like Purdue University, University of Notre Dame and Indiana University, they all wanted their children to be educated in Indiana and return home to work in their countries.

The argument for focusing on math education is also about opportunity. Math is essential for most well-paid careers. Whether a student dreams of becoming president of a large corporation, an engineer, a nurse, a climate scientist or a biologist; math proficiency opens doors. Unfortunately, math anxiety or weak proficiency can quietly close doors long before a young person even realizes it.

This is especially true for students from underserved communities. When schools lack strong math instruction, students lose access to entire career pathways, further widening the inequality gap that reinforces economic divides. Ensuring that all young people study math at a high level is one of the most powerful tools we have to expand upward mobility. It's not just about producing more engineers; it's about giving every student the chance to fully participate in our modern economy.

At Purdue University Northwest, we witness this firsthand every year, particularly in our admissions process.

For many majors, standardized test scores such as the SAT or ACT provide one indicator of academic preparation. In fields that require a defined level of quantitative proficiency, we also use the Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces assessment to evaluate students' readiness for college-level mathematics.

Different fields of study require distinct levels of math proficiency, and the

**“The truth is that math is not about a talent some people are born with. It's about persistence, curiosity and the willingness to wrestle with challenging ideas.”**

ALEKS test becomes a gateway for the various fields. Note that college-level expectations in math haven't really changed, but student preparation has. Many students arrive having been exposed to math, but without having fully mastered it.

Much of the problem is cultural. Unfortunately, in the U.S., it is socially acceptable — even fashionable — to say, “I'm just not good at math.” Conversely, no one goes around saying, “I can't read.” This mindset becomes self-fulfilling, and young people disengage before they've even had a chance to grow.

The truth is that math is not about a talent some people are born with. It's about persistence, curiosity and the willingness to wrestle with challenging ideas. When students experience math as a creative, exploratory discipline rather than a series of rote procedures, they thrive.

We as parents, business leaders and elected officials need to shift our communications around math from one of intimidation to one of empowerment.

That's right, empowerment ... let's all work together to empower more young people to excel in math. ■



► **Don Babcock**

serves on the staff of Purdue University Northwest Chancellor Kenneth Holford as director of economic development and community relations



**McMahon  
& Associates**  
 CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS P.C. SINCE 1971

# COUNT ON US.

## OUR SERVICES

- ✓ Audits/Reviews
- ✓ Taxation
- ✓ Business Valuations
- ✓ Payroll
- ✓ Consulting
- ✓ Estate Planning



#1 *Twenty One Years*  
IN A ROW



**Get in Touch**

219.924.3450

MCMAHONPC.COM



# Centier

BANK



## You're invited to **elevate** your **business!**

# **FREE** Business Checking\*

**BE OUR**   
**guest**

**Open an Account Today!**

1-888-CENTIER | [Centier.com/FBC](https://Centier.com/FBC)

\*First 400 transactions per month are free. Transactions include checks, deposits, and deposited items. \$.25 per item fee thereafter. Debit Card transactions and received ACH entries are not included in the itemized count. Monthly cash deposits greater than \$40,000 will incur a \$.15 charge per \$100. **Member FDIC**